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THE PLAYS OF
ST. JOHN HANKIN

ST. JOHN HANKIN

born 1870

died 1909

Collected Plays first published in 1912, reissued in two volumes in 1923

THE PLAYS OF ST. JOHN HANKIN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN DRINKWATER

VOLUME
ONE

LONDON
MARTIN SECKER
NUMBER FIVE JOHN STREET
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

St. John Emile Clavering Hankin died in 1909, at the age of thirty-nine. To discuss the circumstances of his death would be an irrelevancy that could serve no useful purpose. The only word that need be said in this connection is in answer to an ill-considered suggestion that the event was hastened by some sense of disappointment, an unsatisfied hunger for recognition. All artists of real distinction are alike in being proud of their work; they differ only, for temperamental reasons, in the manner of expressing their pride. Reserve in this matter is not necessarily the virtue of modesty, nor, on the other hand, do we think the less of the makers who have foretold that their rhymes should be more durable than marble monuments. St. John Hankin was proud of his work, and made frank avowal of the fact. "You always think so well of your own plays, Hankin," said a colleague. "Of course I do," was the reply, "otherwise I shouldn't continue to write them." The statement implies no undue self-satisfaction. He was not easily content with the thing he had written, and was a finely conscientious workman in revision and the search for rightness in balance and form. But the task done, he was glad to stand by it, and said so. It is, however, a deep injustice to his memory to suppose that this frankness sprang from any overweening concern for his immediate reputation, and mere folly to add that it affords any clue as to the cause of his last act. In the first place, artists do not die of wounded pride. Keats was not "snuffed out by an article," but by an organic disease, and even Chatterton's tragedy might have been averted by a few shillings a week. Secondly,

Hankin had already received a large measure of the only kind of recognition that he valued. He was not forced to write for money, and he neither expected nor wished his plays to be readily accepted by the general public. He was deliberately in the camp of the pioneers, and did not look for the rewards of conformity. But his work had won the approval of progressive audiences, and had been acclaimed by the most liberal critical opinion. The new repertory movement in the theatre, upon which he himself exercised so important an influence, was in turn recognising him as one of its most notable products. His name was one of credit among the people who were seeking to quicken a stage that had grown moribund, and the knowledge that this was so gave him just and genuine pleasure. He was working with a clearly defined aim, and he was achieving his purpose as rapidly as any man can hope to do. St. John Hankin the neglected and disappointed dramatist is a myth. At the time of his death he was winning and enjoying the best kind of success, and his end was one of those untimely accidents of temperament and physical circumstance that we are wise to accept without too curious analysis. Nor would it be profitable to speculate as to what might have been added to his achievement had his life been prolonged. We have to consider his work as it stands, and examine the grounds upon which its claims to permanence may be established.

The decadence of English drama, that began with the passing away of the Elizabethans and has been arrested only in our own day, has commonly been supposed to have been the penalty paid for the neglect of life. By decadence we do not mean a lack of superficial and momentary success. Every age has produced its harvest of plays that would attract and hold large, if uncritical, audiences, and they have not always been wholly bad plays. The great mass of them have, indeed, been radically deficient in true dramatic sense, and, by substituting violent events and action for ideas

and character focussed into action, have vulgarised a great art. But a substantial minority have been the product of sincere observation and some feeling for character. And yet, the plays written in England between the end of the Shakespearian age and the beginning of the present generation that are of indisputable excellence when put to the test of the stage and also survive the processes of time might be numbered at a bare dozen ; certainly no more. The Restoration dramatists would contribute two or three between them ; Goldsmith claims one, perhaps two ; Sheridan two, possibly three. The list is not easily to be lengthened. On the other hand, most of the poets of high rank have written plays, and in many cases plays that are immortal but only by virtue of qualities that are not stage qualities. Action is not essential to the stage, but in its absence there must be some direct progression of idea or spiritual conflict that shall perform its office of holding the attention of an audience. The poets have, justly, thrown action from its usurped station in drama, but they have failed either to use it in proper measure or to substitute its equivalent, and for this reason their influence has been deflected from the theatre. We have, then, the few plays that have held the stage and still live ; the poets' plays that are imperishable but do not fulfil the requirements of the stage ; the large number of plays that sought only a momentary and sensational success and could not, by reason of their essential abuse of dramatic art, achieve more. And there are left those plays, cumulatively through the generations a large number, that had in them some sincerity and conscience and also a measure of fitness for the stage, and have yet passed into oblivion. If we ask ourselves why these plays have perished, we find that the suggestion that the stage had divorced itself from life leaves the question unanswered. The truth is that the stage fell upon evil days not because it divorced itself from life, but because it divorced itself from literature. Literature means style in the expres-

sion of life, and if we look at those plays that paid some heed to life and adjusted it with skill to the theatre, we find that the one supreme quality that they lacked is style. The poets have always brought this quality to the drama, but they have neglected the rightful demands of the stage in other things. Drama that shall succeed in the theatre and also be a permanent addition to the art of the world can only spring from the union of an understanding of stage-craft and the faculty of at once seeing and apprehending life and character, or at least manners, and bringing to their expression that discipline of language which is style.

The loftiest style is employed in the service of poetry. When the impulse to express the thing seen passes beyond a certain degree of urgency the expression takes on a new quality of rhythmical force shaping itself generally into verse. The difference between fine prose and fine verse is fundamentally rather one of urgency, of intensity, than of beauty. The greatest verse may have a loveliness that is not to be found in the greatest prose, but this beauty is a result of the essential distinction, not the distinction itself. It is for this reason that our new drama, full as it is of hope and even achievement, does not yet make any serious challenge to that of the Elizabethans. With two or three exceptions, the plays that we have produced have not been forced by the sheer strength of their begetting impulse into poetic form. But many of them have already been so forced into style, a style lower than the highest, but of clear authenticity, and these are plays too that are fitted to the requirements of stage presentation. We have not yet regained our lost estate, but we are realising that it is worth regaining, and already the result is a quickening of our dramatic perception. A knowledge of life and the theatre is no longer considered sufficient equipment for the playwright, and men of real literary gifts, men, that is, with the gift of style, are seeking first to understand the theatre so that they may bring their labours to its service.

Introduction

The stage is renewing its old relation to literature, and that is the most wholesome thing that has happened to the stage for three centuries. It was St. John Hankin's privilege and distinction to be one of the first dramatists in England to help in the establishment of this reunion. The great worth of his plays lies not in their philosophy; after all, the Eustace Jacksons of the world have never lacked persuasive and perfectly logical advocates, and Mrs. Cassilis only invents a new trick to emphasise a very old truth. It is not in the technical excellence of their stage-craft; they are often merciless to producer and actors, and St. John Hankin's stage has a habit of resolving itself into a veritable chess-board. They will take a permanent place in the theatre because they are, on the whole and in spite of their flaws in this respect, constructed for action on the stage, and their expression of the dramatist's view of life is vibrant with style from beginning to end.

The distinction between writing that has this quality of style and writing that lacks it is not the distinction between the same thing well and ill said; it is the distinction between two entirely different things. It is the difference between the dull acceptance which is knowledge and the swift realisation which is imaginative thought. The former might induce a man to speak of one dead as, say, having "escaped from a very worrying world and the annoyances of jealous and unjust people and the disappointments of life in general," but it is clearly a mistake to suppose that he experiences or expresses the same spiritual emotion as the man who cries out:

> He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
> Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
> And that unrest which men miscall delight
> Can touch him not and torture not again;
> From the contagion of the world's slow stain
> He is secure, and now can never mourn
> A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;

> Nor when the spirit's self has ceased to burn
> With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

The difference here is that between formal assent and vision. Ultimately it is sincerity that creates style, and sincerity has been lost to our theatre save for brief interludes until these new dramatists once again began to write not from rumour but from conscience. Those momentarily successful plays that presented life not altogether distorted and at the same time fulfilled the technical requirements of the stage perished because their virtues were not really sincere. Their makers said the right thing because it was commonly reported to be the right thing and not from conviction, and consequently said it ill, which, artistically, amounted to not saying it at all. Lacking the sincerity which should result in style, they lacked the power of complete utterance, and in art a thing either is completely said or it does not exist. We must not, of course, confuse completeness with over-elaboration; reticence is often the spirit of style. Completeness implies the embodiment of the creative ecstasy of the artist with the actual statement made, and this ecstasy cannot exist, of course, apart from the strictest sincerity.

Among the many vague generalities that have gained currency among us none is more thoughtless than the pronouncement that art should imitate nature. It should do nothing of the sort. When Oscar Wilde asserted that, on the contrary, nature imitates art, he was only refuting what he knew to be a shallow conventionalism with his usual fantastic gaiety. It would need a good deal of ingenious sophistry for such an ideal to find a more excellent realisation than the photograph and the gramophone. Nature—life—becomes art only by concentration and selection. A play focusses into two hours the selected and concentrated experience of many lives, and it finds an expression that is correspondingly artificial and purged.

Its failure to do this is the measure of its failure as a work of art. It is for this reason that the greatest drama is the poetic drama, where the expression reaches the highest artificiality, and the symbol most consistently takes the place of the traditional formula of speech. To say that a play is true to life, in the sense that it is an unshaped extract from life, and that its people speak in life-like speech, is utterly to condemn it. Those plays of which I have spoken frequently preserved, when they were not couched in fustian rhetoric, the most exact parallel to the daily use of conversation. The point is that in either case they were the result of hearsay and not of imagination ; they accepted without question either the false rumours of literature which their authors had never examined or the current speech of daily life which had lost all freshness and a great deal of its meaning. Ibsen paused to consider this question before making his plays, or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that, bringing real creative impulse to his work, he necessarily rejected at the outset the false doctrines of common acceptance. St. John Hankin was one of the men who, consciously or not, profited by the example. His characters are as far removed as possible in expression from a debased tradition of literary grandiosity, and, on the other hand, they are far from reaching high imaginative utterance. But their speech is, nevertheless, definitely one of the imagination.

HENRY. It was extremely undignified and quite unnecessary. If you had simply come up to the front door and rung the bell you would have been received just as readily.

EUSTACE. I doubt it. In fact, I doubt if I should have been received at all. I might possibly have been given a bed for the night, but only on the distinct understanding that I left early the next morning. Whereas now nobody talks of my going. A poor invalid ! In the doctor's hand ! Perfect quiet essential. No. My plan was best.

HENRY. Why didn't that fool Glaisher see through you ?

EUSTACE. Doctors never see through their patients. It's

not what they're paid for, and it's contrary to professional etiquette. [HENRY *snorts wrathfully*.] Besides, Glaisher's an ass, I'm glad to say.

HENRY [*fuming*]. It would serve you right if I told the Governor the whole story.

EUSTACE. I daresay. But you won't. It wouldn't be cricket. Besides, I only told you on condition you kept it to yourself.

HENRY [*indignant*]. And so I'm to be made a partner in your fraud. The thing's a swindle, and I've got to take a share in it.

EUSTACE. Swindle? Not a bit. You've lent a hand—without intending it—to reuniting a happy family circle. Smoothed the way for the Prodigal's return. A very beautiful trait in your character.

HENRY [*grumpy*]. What I don't understand is why you told me all this. Why in heaven's name didn't you keep the whole discreditable story to yourself?

EUSTACE [*with flattering candour*]. The fact is I was pretty sure you'd find me out. The Governor's a perfect owl, but you've got brains—of a kind. You can see a thing when it's straight before your nose. So I thought I'd let you into the secret from the start, just to keep your mouth shut.

HENRY. Tck! [*Thinks for a moment.*] And what are you going to do now you are at home?

EUSTACE [*airily*]. Do, my dear chap? Why, nothing.

[*And on the spectacle of* EUSTACE's *smiling self-assurance, and* HENRY's *outraged moral sense, the curtain falls.*]

That is not the speech of daily life. No two brothers ever talked to each other or could talk so. There is in their conversation something added to the actual argument between the two men, and this addition is the imagination of St. John Hankin. Eustace and Henry Jackson are not wholly creatures of their own independent being; they exist partly in terms of their creator's temperament and vision, and they justly and inevitably bear witness to this fact in their utterance. The philosophy that finds a spark of the Godhead in every man is relatively applicable to art. The creature bears in him some token of the creator, and

unless he does so he is deprived of his proudest right. The dramatist whose characters are set out photographically, not reflected through the distinctive medium of his own personality, does not create at all and he has no claim to consideration as an artist. He may then catch the verisimilitude of speech, but the spirit with which he should invest words must necessarily be beyond his consciousness, and his expression will remain untranslated into style.

It is a curious fact that this essential condition of all art should have been so often overlooked in dramatic criticism whilst its importance has been consistently recognised in the discussion of the other arts. A poem or a picture or a statue is accounted as deficient in the finer parts of its being unless it bears in its composition some signature of its source, and yet for some obscure reason we have been asked to consider it as a virtue that a play should be as a bough lopped from the tree of life, unshaped and showing no pressure of the artist's hand. The great dramatists have never bestowed their approval on this monstrous notion by their practice. The art of the dramatist is, indeed, more essentially objective than that of his fellows, but objectivity in art does not imply an abortive dissociation of the thing seen from the eyes that see. Strangely enough, St. John Hankin, who realised this truth always in his art, appeared to lend support to its violation in an essay otherwise full of admirable reason. "It is the dramatist's business," he says, "to represent life, not to argue about it." It is, perhaps, not special pleading to suggest that in speaking of argument he had in mind the distortion of life to make it conform to fore-ordained ends. The sentence is to be found in the *Note on Happy Endings*, where he justly resents the sentimental intrusion of expediency on the dramatist's conception of truth. His protest would seem to be made rather against the sophistical devices of argument than against argument in the shape of commentary, but, with so important an issue at stake, he would have done well

to have considered his statement more carefully. However this may be, it is clear that all dramatists who have written sincerely have not only represented life, but argued about it. The very texture of their expression, as in the passage that has been quoted, is an implicit argument about life in that it knits up the artist's temperament into the speech of his characters. But the argument has always been explicit also, a deliberate as well as an incidental commentary. The Greek chorus was, fundamentally, a device employed by the poet whereby he might exercise this privilege of argument. The characters that he created might be allowed to work out their own destiny as far as he could enable them to do so by virtue of his experience of life; but he was careful to reserve his right of commentary upon the process. The æsthetic value of this determination is obvious. Our demand of the artist is that he should show us not life, but his vision of life. The earliest English drama made frank allowance of this right, an allowance too frank, indeed, to be artistically sound. The explicit argument was not clearly cut off from the characterisation as it had been by the Greeks, nor was it yet woven into the fibre of the characterisation in the manner attempted by the Elizabethans. And the Elizabethans themselves were not blameless in this matter. In rejecting the classical model Shakespeare set himself the most difficult of his technical problems. His magnificent genius justified its own choice, but the soliloquy was, inherently, a less perfect artistic form than the chorus. The greatest difficulty in the loyal presentation of Shakespeare's plays is in dealing convincingly with these choric soliloquies. To adopt the line of least resistance and cut them out, as is commonly done, is merely to maim the poet. Shakespeare felt the artistic necessity of comment upon his creations, but in blurring the dividing line between his dramatic and choric statement instead of defining it sharply he deprived his audience of help to which it has a legitimate claim.

But difficulty is no excuse for inefficiency, and no Shakespearian production is of the slightest æsthetic value that does not honestly seek to meet the difficulty instead of resorting to cowardly evasion.

The demands of art upon the artist are inexorable. The artist finds certain requirements imposed upon him by his work from which there is no escape. And one of these is this necessity of the chorus, or the poet's argument in drama. The whole significance of the chorus in the drama of the theatre had fallen into neglect and oblivion, because the plays of the theatre were being written by men who had no sincerity of artistic impulse. And then, as soon as men once more bring their conscience to this work and write sincerely as artists, we find the necessity reasserting itself in spite of any reasoned denial. The new dramatists, of whom St. John Hankin was one of the ablest and sincerest, seemed to be determined that the construction of their plays should follow a false tradition at least in this, that it should not allow anything to interfere with the development of the action. But they were too good artists to be able to carry out their own determination. Being sincere, and creating characters instead of cutting them out with a pair of scissors, they found it necessary, as we have seen, to invest them with something of their own temper, and that in itself wholesomely disturbed the mechanical continuity that had become a fetish. Here was the beginning of regeneration, and the beginning forced its own growth. Having brought implicit argument back to the drama, they felt an artistic desire for argument that was explicit. Not being quite sure of themselves, they refrained from satisfying the desire openly, and they started a new tradition, which will, it is safe to prophesy, prove nothing more than the prelude to a return to the frank acceptance of an essential artistic necessity. They invented the stage direction. Not the old direction that set out a stage and brought people on to it and off again, but a new full-bodied thing that enabled

them to do something which their art compelled them to do.

General Bonsor [*too broken with the world's ingratitude to protest further*]. Boring! [*Follows* Miss Triggs, *shaking his poor old head. There is a pause while we realise that one of the most tragic things in life is to be a bore—and to know it.* Mrs. Eversleigh, *however, not being cursed with the gift of an imaginative sympathy, wastes no pity on the General. Instead of this she turns to her sister, and, metaphorically speaking, knocks her out of the ring.*]

That is pure chorus, and nothing else. And again :

Mrs. Jackson. But what became of your money, dear? The thousand pounds your father gave you?

Eustace. I lost it.

Mrs. Jackson [*looking vaguely round as if* Eustace *might have dropped it somewhere on the carpet, in which case, of course, it ought to be picked up before some one treads on it*]. Lost it?

This is as clear in intention as a chorus of Trojan women, and instances are to be found on nearly every page of the authentic artists who are re-establishing the credit of our theatre. They are, indeed, to be found on the pages only, not yet on the stage in their complete and rightful authority ; but the fact that they are conceived and written is evidence of the return of a perfectly sound instinct. The most complete attempts to give this elemental desire natural expression that have yet been made in modern drama are, perhaps, to be found in certain of Mr. Yeats's plays and in the Gaffer of Mr. Masefield's *Nan.*

The Two Mr. Wetherbys was written in 1902. Before that date St. John Hankin had worked as dramatic and literary critic, and was known as a contributor to *Punch.* He had by him, too, the usual sheaf of plays, and was wise enough to leave them in their pigeon-holes when his reputation as a dramatist might have lent them a value not their own. He looked upon *The Two Mr. Wetherbys* as the first achievement by which he cared to stand. *Mr. Punch's*

Dramatic Sequels was published in 1901, but its wit is relatively immature and not comparable with that of his *Lost Masterpieces*, published three years later. Between 1902 and his death he wrote seven plays and began an eighth, and it is upon these that his reputation rests. In *The Two Mr. Wetherbys* certain of his qualities appear almost in their full development, others scarcely at all. The faculty of writing dialogue, the style, the salty wit and the debonair, faintly cynical philosophy of life, are all there. But there is as yet nothing of the deeper humour and the real tenderness that were to throw their gracious charity over the mocking satire of the later plays, nor is the artistic sincerity yet perfect. It is the only one of his plays that has a conventionally happy ending of the kind that he laughed at so vigorously in the preface from which I have already quoted, and it is the only one that ends unsatisfactorily. In sending Dick and Constantia off to inevitable domestic tribulation he may have had his tongue in his cheek, but, if so, the humour was too subtle to be safe, involving as it did a direct negation of his own conviction. The whole question of the destiny of the artists' creations is necessarily one that each artist must decide for himself. St. John Hankin quite rightly decided that the romantic conclusions popularly favoured were false. It does not follow that they are false to life or to another artist's view of life, but simply that they were false for him. They are, indeed, commonly enough so contrived as to fail altogether in artistic conviction, but this does not affect their radical fitness when conceived by the right temperament. Eustace Jackson's engagement to Stella Faringford would, doubtless, have trebled the popularity of *The Return of the Prodigal*, but any balance in our knowledge of life, or, more particularly, in our knowledge of Hankin's vision of life, precludes us from deploring his refusal to sanction such an event ; but we are, none the less, profoundly disturbed by the accident that prevents the consummation of Romeo's love for Juliet.

It is the prerogative of passion to take no account of institutions or social expediency. Great poets in their most passionate seasons create without reference to anything save their own burning conception. Love's moment is for them an immortal term which is independent of any subsequent reaction or retribution. But it was Hankin's limitation as an artist that he could not see life detached from such institutions and expediencies. He could see clearly but not very deeply; his characters are alive and considered from many points of view, but he was never able to divest them of the rags of circumstance. The danger of passion was, in consequence, a more real thing for him than its glory. Much as he did for the renascence of drama in many ways, he was yet far from bringing reason under the fine subjection of the imagination. Eustace's marriage to Stella would have been a catastrophe only because these people were created by Hankin's temperament; a greater imagination might have made such an event triumphant. An artist, however, is not to be censured for his limitations, but only for his refusal to recognise and work within them. Of the higher things of passion Hankin was incapable, but he was wisely content to acknowledge the incapacity, and, working consistently within his powers, he rediscovered certain artistic principles of first-rate importance, in the expression of an impulse not of the highest order, yet in itself of no mean value.

The Return of the Prodigal, which followed the *Wetherbys*, was written in 1904. Not only have the qualities that were found in the earlier play matured, but there are new qualities discovered. If it was not given to him to be passionate, Hankin here shows that he could encompass a quite rare tenderness. Mrs. Jackson, first-cousin to the Lady Denison of a later date, is conceived with a charity that has in it no trace of cynicism. She is not a central figure in the play, and yet she is, it seems to me, more completely imagined than any other character in the whole

of Hankin's work. This is not to say that she is the most striking of his people, but there is in her just that subtlety of presentment that is the product not of deliberation but of uncurbed artistic instinct. She is there for no other purpose than to satisfy the dramatist's impulse to embody a type for which he clearly had no common affection. Eustace and Henry, Samuel Jackson and even his daughter Violet, admirably fashioned as they are, are yet moved by a purpose that is not wholly their own, and answer in some measure to the dictates of the dramatist's formal reason. But Mrs. Jackson is a complete creation, arguing nothing, doing nothing, merely being, and in her Hankin approaches poetic imagination in conception if not in utterance. And it is noteworthy that, moving on this higher artistic plane, her influence upon the other characters of the play is more authentically dramatic than is that commonly operating between Hankin's people. The conflict between Eustace and his father and brother is, again, primarily one of the reasons, just as, in a lesser degree is that between him and his sister. They have a definite and circumstantial problem to solve, and they argue the matter out consistently in terms of their own personalities. But Eustace's relation to his mother is an emotional one, and consequently far more moving. "Dear old mater. She's not clever, but for real goodness of heart I don't know her equal." Speaking of her he becomes, for a moment, greater than himself, concerned with simple and fundamental and not complex and superficial things.

In 1905 two plays were written, *The Charity that Began at Home* and *The Cassilis Engagement*. If Hankin saw life in something less than heroic proportions, he was at least able to apply an almost faultless logic to the life that he did see. His world was circumscribed, but he purged it thoroughly of shams ; and if to do this is not the highest function of the artist, it is one of the most worthy functions of the artist who professes no kinship with the greatest.

And it is certainly to be accounted to him artistically as a virtue that, although he exposed what he considered to be ethical and social fallacies in some measure by statement and argument, he did so in a larger measure by the operation of character. In other words, although he intuitively realised the necessity of the chorus in drama, he was also able to preserve a just balance between chorus and action. The questions that confront Lady Denison and Mrs. Cassilis are considered by the dramatist not only with fine subtlety and mental precision, but also with a quite notable instinct for dramatic form. Generally speaking, the impulse behind the plays is not sufficiently imaginative to raise them save at rare intervals to the level of a Mrs. Jackson, but the instinct that directed the adjustment of the relations of the dramatist's reflections to the action of his characters was in nearly every case sound. Whilst the dramatist may and should argue about life it is not his business to argue about ideas in the abstract. If he uses his characters merely as mouth-pieces for the exploitation of abstractions he abuses them ; his privilege of choric commentary is justly exercised only when it is confined to the contemplation of ideas that shape themselves out of the action of his characters ; when, in other words, it is applied to the general only as it is resolved from the particular. It is not for Œdipus, crushed, blind and bereft, driven from his fellows, to be conscious of more than his immediate misery ; life, for him, has become the present moment of fierce pain and nothing more. But the poet, seeing his creation set against the whole of experience, remembering this man's beginning and story and all men's hope, can draw from the disastrous moment an abstract idea purged into peace, almost into exultation :

Ye citizens of Thebes, behold ; 'tis Œdipus that passeth here,
Who read the riddle-word of Death, and mightiest stood of mortal men,
And Fortune loved him and the folk that saw him turned and looked again.

Lo, he is fallen, and around great storms and the outreaching sea!
Therefore, O man, beware and look toward the end of things that be,
The last of sights, the last of days, and no man's life account as gain
Ere the full tale be finished and the darkness find him without pain.[1]

Hankin was not a poet and did not move upon these emotional planes, but within the limits of his own less ambitious design his instinct guided him to a proportion in this matter that was perfectly just, and he helped definitely towards a new understanding of one of the subtlest principles of dramatic form.

The Last of the De Mullins was written in 1907, and was Hankin's last dramatic work save two one-act plays and an unfinished comedy. The sociological problem which is its theme is set out with his customary lucidity and investigated fairly in terms of art and not of propaganda. Great passion in art is always the product of the imagination, and yet it is in this play which is farther away from imagination than any other of his more important efforts, that he approaches most nearly to passion. The reason is that Hankin's imagination being the least developed of his qualities, the problems of reason which he explored depended for their power of moving him deeply upon the directness with which they were stated. The social question of Janet De Mullin is more complete and clearly stated than those of Mrs. Cassilis and Geoffrey, of Lady Denison or Eustace Jackson. However improbable it may be, it is remotely possible that an adjustment of circumstances might show Mrs. Cassilis to be mistaken, Lady Denison to be wise in her charity, and the Jackson compromise

[1] Professor Gilbert Murray's translation. It is a striking commentary upon the common confusion as to the æsthetic meaning of the choric element in drama that in the production of *Œdipus Rex* in this country in 1912 these last lines which, when spoken as Sophocles directed, by the chorus, have an emotional value scarcely to be paralleled in dramatic poetry, were allotted to Œdipus himself, and so deprived of every vestige of significance.

to be something other than the best possible solution of the family conflict. This is not to suggest that Hankin should have resolved these plays in any way other than that he chose, but to point out that in each instance it might be urged that he controlled the conduct of his protagonists to certain ends, and that other ends are conceivable. But Janet's attitude and conduct are inevitable, and her decisions are the only ones that we could accept as being possible. And this tightening up of his reasoning faculty served Hankin for the moment in some measure as a substitute for imaginative intensity and brought him near to passion. Janet is the one figure among his men and women of whom we can think as loving passionately and being passionately loved.

The new seriousness of *The Last of the De Mullins* precluded any free exercise of the wit that had been so admirably employed in the earlier plays, but otherwise his qualities here reach their full maturity. The mastery of style has developed, and the characterisation has gained in subtlety and the power of suggestion. Mrs. De Mullin may be set beside Lady Denison and Mrs. Jackson, and De Mullin himself, choleric and stiff-necked as he is, bears witness anew to the tenderness with which his creator contemplated the foibles and prejudices of his creations. It was a rare gift of Hankin's, one that has been memorable in many greater men, this faculty of making human weakness at least not contemptible. There is scarcely a noble figure in his plays—even Violet Jackson lacks something of courage—and yet there is scarcely one for whom we cannot spare some affection. Lady Faringford herself might discover a heart at any moment.

The two one-act plays, *The Burglar Who Failed* and *The Constant Lover*, were both written in 1908. The former is an amiable little farce, not unpleasing, but far from showing the dramatist at his best. It has an air of being manufactured. But *The Constant Lover* is one of the

most perfectly polished excursions in prose comedy dialogue that the new drama has produced. Conceived with a fancy of quite uncommon delicacy, the play is carried through from the first word to the last without a flaw. It is full of good sunshine and laughter, light and debonair yet wholly sincere. Hankin never realised his aim more fully than in this little masterpiece, and although it stands of necessity below his more ambitious work in many ways it is, perhaps, a more perfect achievement than anything else that he did. He himself valued it highly, and the last letter he ever wrote closed with a reference to it, poignant and yet not without cheer.

When he died Hankin left an unfinished play, *Thompson*. He had written the first act and some later fragments. Relying far more upon a conventional and definite plot than was his custom, it was clearly his intention to give free rein in the dialogue to the wit of which he was a master. Mr. George Calderon's able completion of an extremely difficult task must speak for itself. In addition to his plays Hankin wrote a number of essays on the theatre which, apart from the excellence of their matter, are remarkable for their admirable prose. As in the plays, imaginative beauty is beyond the writer's aim, but there is always a clear-cut precision, a lucidity and balance of statement, that are a lasting delight even when the subject under discussion is not of permanent interest or the point of view has become obsolete.

But when the Puritan stayed away from the theatre altogether, irrespective of the character of the play presented, his approval or disapproval became a matter of indifference to the management. It is very gratifying, of course, when you put up a play to have it praised by the godly for its elevating tendency. But if none of the godly will come to see it your only course is to withdraw it and substitute something to attract the wicked. For the wicked, with all their faults, buy seats. And so the drama, which, like the rest of the arts, is in its essence neither moral nor immoral, neither religious

nor irreligious, got a bad name, and when a calling, or an art, or an institution gets a bad name it soon begins to deserve it.

That is a fair example of the style employed in these essays, and it would be difficult to find a higher excellence in the same province.

In these occasional papers Hankin makes many shrewd observations upon his art and allows us many entertaining glimpses of his philosophy in the rough, of the materials in his workshop. How suggestive, for example, in the light of the plays, is that passage in the essay on "Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic," where he slyly opposes his own spirit of comedy to the rather strait solemnity that he was one of the few men wise enough to find in his subject. Quoting a paragraph from Mr. Shaw's "Dramatic Opinions," he comments, "This is not the voice of a jester. It is the voice of Dr. Clifford," and proceeds,

Again, of Miss Mary Anderson's autobiography he writes:

"Note how she assumes, this girl who thinks she has been an artist, that the object of going on the stage is to sparkle in the world and that the object of life is happiness!"

One can almost hear the thump on the cushion as the preacher utters that sentence. Yet I fancy most people have been in the habit of regarding Mr. Shaw's attitude towards the theatre as one of flippant tolerance largely tinged with contempt. The republication of these criticisms should serve to correct that impression. One would rather like to hear, by the way, what the "object of life" really is from Mr. Shaw's point of view. Perhaps some day he will write a play about it.

St. John Hankin lived and wrote at the beginning of a new movement, and his permanent distinction in drama will be rather that of right endeavour and the recapture of just instincts than of full-bodied achievement. But that his plays have durable qualities there is no question. They are a valuable effort towards the re-establishment of the union between drama and literature; they contain

at leaſt a ſuggeſtion of a return to true principles of dramatic form ; they have not ſtyle in its rarer manifeſtation, but they have ſtyle, and that is much. Hankin's characters are not very passionately conceived, nor are they ſtirred often by the essential emotions of men, but they have life. The comedy which is Falſtaff can ſtale only with the change of fundamental humanity ; the comedy which is Euſtace Jackson might lose some of its flavour with a change of certain social conditions ; Euſtace is, nevertheless, a quick creation and not a puppet. The *Note on Happy Endings* pleasantly emphasises the fine objectivity with which the dramatiſt saw his characters. In bringing them into exiſtence he gave them also some independence of being, and is able seriously to discuss their future and their problems of conduct with as much detachment as he would gossip of his neighbours over the teacups. In the essay on Mr. Shaw he gives counsel to critics that is peculiarly valuable in the consideration of his own plays :

> Our dramatic critics, as a class, are always asking whether the dramatiſt is doing what *they* want, inſtead of giving their minds to the only queſtion of any importance critically, namely, whether he has done what *he* wants, and done it competently.

And done it competently. That is the point. It does not follow that even if he has done this we shall like his work, but in that event it is better to leave it alone than to denounce it for not being something else. Swinburne was not far wide of the mark when he said that the only criticism of value was the criticism that praised. Those of us who believe that the ſtage cannot regain its full vigour until it has rediscovered poetry as its natural expression, find in Hankin and his three or four adventurous fellows invigorating promise rather than fulfilment, but we are foolish if we refuse gratitude to the men who have made the firſt ſtep towards the new eſtate and deny ourselves the pleasure that their work can give. Among these men

Hankin takes an honourable place, and that he was one of the few who first sought to bring back sincerity and a fit dignity of form to a great art is a distinction of which he will not easily be deprived.

JOHN DRINKWATER.

THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS

A MIDDLE-CLASS COMEDY

(1902)

"*Life is a comedy to those who think,*
a tragedy to those who feel."
HORACE WALPOLE

SCENES

ACT I. *The Drawing-room at the James Wetherbys'.*

ACT II. *The Dining-room at the James Wetherbys'.*

ACT III. *Same as Act I.*

The curtain is dropped for a moment half-way through Act II to represent the lapse of three hours.

CHARACTERS

RICHARD WETHERBY, *the bad Mr. Wetherby, living in a bachelor flat in London.*

CONSTANTIA, *Margaret's sister, married to Richard but separated from him.*

JAMES WETHERBY, *the good Mr. Wetherby, living* en famille *at Norwood.*

MARGARET, *his wife.*

AUNT CLARA, *aunt to Margaret and Constantia, a pious old lady of sixty-five.*

ROBERT CARNE, *her nephew, a solemn prig with no digestion.*

MAID *at the James Wetherbys'.*

SCENE: Mr. James Wetherby's house at Norwood. The action of the play takes some twenty hours, from the afternoon of one day to the forenoon of the next.

THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS

ACT I

SCENE.—*The* JAMES WETHERBYS' *drawing-room at Norwood. A door on the right leads to Hall. French windows at back, closed, give on to suburban garden. Fireplace on the left, writing-table with chair, facing audience. Circular settee to seat three, one with back to audience, the other two facing right and left, occupies centre of stage. General furnishing of room philistine but not shabby. A profusion of plush photograph frames on mantelpiece and on upright piano which stands against wall on the right. One of the most conspicuous frames on mantelpiece contains photograph of* JAMES WETHERBY.

When Curtain rises, AUNT CLARA, *an old lady of sixty-five, is discovered in arm-chair making a crochet shawl.* JAMES *is sitting near her on settee reading a newspaper aloud.*

JAMES [*in bored voice*]. "It is, however, abundantly clear that the Government possesses the confidence of the country and that unless some unforeseen difficulty arises the present administration will remain in power at least until the autumn." [*Yawns slightly.*] I beg your pardon, Aunt Clara. "Meantime it is for the Prime Minister and his colleagues to take measures to prevent any diminution in that confidence, and to see to it that when the next General Election takes place, the Conservative party are not merely returned to power, but returned with an even larger majority.

Only in this way can the enemies of this country be convinced that her destiny is in strong and capable hands, and be restrained from embarking on enterprises hurtful to her interests or damaging to her prestige." [*Yawns.*] "To hand over the task of forming a Government to the disunited factions of the Opposition would be——"

AUNT CLARA [*in hard clear tone*]. Will you kindly pick up my wool, James? It has rolled under the settee.

JAMES. Certainly, Aunt Clara. [*Grovels for it, and after disentangling it from various chair legs, returns with it triumphant, but flushed with exertion.*] Here it is. [*Places it on the table beside her. She replaces it on her lap where it is obvious that it will once more fall in a minute or two.*] Now where was I? Ah, here we are. [*Resuming bored voice.*] "It is however abundantly clear that the Government possesses the confidence of the country [AUNT CLARA'S *ball again seeks the floor*] and that unless some unforeseen difficulty arises the present administration will remain in power. . . ." [*Reads on as before.*

AUNT CLARA [*feeling for wool*]. There! It's gone again!

JAMES [*bored*]. Where is it *now*, Aunt?

AUNT CLARA. On the floor. I had it on my lap a moment ago. It must have rolled under that chair. Will you give it me, please? [JAMES *puts down paper with the least possible suggestion of irritation and recommences grovelling. Finally again emerges successful and places it on table.*] Thank you, James. [*Replaces it on her lap.*]

JAMES [*eyeing the manœuvre with strong disfavour*]. Wouldn't it be better to leave it on the table? Then it wouldn't be so likely to slip off.

AUNT CLARA [*placidly*]. No, I'm used to having it on my lap.

JAMES. Very well, Aunt. Shall I go on? [*Picks up paper again.*] "It is however abundantly clear that the Government possesses the confidence of the country and that

unless some unforeseen difficulty arises . . ." [*Yawns again.*]

AUNT CLARA [*in her hard, clear tones*]. Haven't you read that part before?

JAMES. It does sound rather familiar.

AUNT CLARA [*severely*]. I'm afraid you're not reading with much attention, James.

JAMES. I suppose not, I'm rather tired. [*Smothers another yawn.*]

AUNT CLARA [*offended*]. Perhaps we had better put aside our reading for this afternoon, then.

JAMES [*putting down paper with sigh of relief and rising*]. Very well, Aunt. [*Strolls towards garden.*

AUNT CLARA [*quite unconscious of this manœuvre*]. We might talk a little instead. After luncheon when I'm not being read to, I like to converse for a few minutes. It prevents me from going to sleep.

JAMES [*to her, turning back from garden*]. You're sure you wouldn't *rather* go to sleep?

AUNT CLARA. No, James. I do not approve of this modern habit of sleeping during the day. [JAMES *sighs dismally and goes to fire where he stands with back to mantelpiece, looking profoundly bored.*] [*Putting down crochet on table.*] Has Constantia come yet?

JAMES. No, she won't be here much before tea, I expect.

AUNT CLARA. And Richard?

JAMES. Dick comes about the same time.

AUNT CLARA [*reproachfully*]. I cannot think how you could have asked Richard to stay here! After the way he treated Constantia!

JAMES [*casually*]. Oh, Dick's not a bad fellow. He didn't get on with Constantia, of course, but he's got his good points all the same.

AUNT CLARA [*severely*]. I have never been able to find them. His treatment of your sister-in-law was shame-

ful. I am sure with *your* high principles you would be the last to defend it.

JAMES [*hastily*]. Of course, of course. Still one mustn't judge too harshly.

AUNT CLARA. I hope I do not, James. Indeed, it would be hard to do so in *this* case.

JAMES [*bored*]. He's only coming for one night. And after all he is my brother.

AUNT CLARA. *That* scarcely seems to me to be in his favour. You are too forgiving, James. Personally, I don't approve of this modern habit of forgiving people. It encourages them. And to invite him here! What *will* Constantia think?

JAMES. I did it partly to oblige Constantia. When the separation between her and my brother was decided on, it was arranged that the two parties should meet once a year. It was thought that this might open the way to a reconciliation later. When the date for the meeting approached, the question immediately arose, where should it take place? Constantia wished it to be at her house here in Norwood. Dick declined this, and suggested his flat in Maddox Street. Each of them, in fact, wanted it to take place on his own ground. To put an end to all discussion I suggested that it should be here. And here it is to be. [*Smothers another yawn.*]

AUNT CLARA. Ah, James, you are always thoughtful for others! If only your brother had been like you! But he has *no* heart.

JAMES. Dick's all right. He's been a little wild, but he'll settle down. [*Looks at watch.*] I suppose he'll be here about half-past four.

AUNT CLARA. Robert will arrive rather earlier.

JAMES [*endeavouring to conceal his disgust*]. Robert! Why, he was here to luncheon.

AUNT CLARA. Yes, but he is coming back to tea. In Constantia's interest he thought as many of her relatives

as possible should be present during the interview—to support her.

JAMES [*grimly*]. I don't think *Robert* would be much support.

AUNT CLARA. You never can tell. A man of his high principles!

JAMES [*impatiently*]. Oh, his *principles* are all right.

AUNT CLARA. I am sure *you* do not undervalue such things.

JAMES [*hastily*]. My dear Aunt Clara, certainly not. Still Robert is not exactly a *strong* man, is he?—except in principles, I mean. [*Crosses to the table.*

AUNT CLARA. My poor nephew certainly enjoys wretched health.

JAMES. I wonder whether he has enough to do? [*At back of table.*]

AUNT CLARA [*complacently*]. Robert has *plenty* of occupation. He comes to see me every day!

JAMES. Yes, he's generally here, I notice.

AUNT CLARA. You are so hospitable. And Robert is devoted to his relations. That shows such a nice nature.

JAMES [*bored*]. No doubt.

AUNT CLARA [*enthusiastically*]. And then he does so much good. Always busy about collecting subscriptions for some deserving object. I call that such a *useful* life. His means, poor fellow, don't allow of his contributing himself, but he collects quite a large sum from *others*.

JAMES [*grimly*]. Yes, I've noticed that!

AUNT CLARA. I am sure you are grateful to him. He is always pointing out to you institutions where money may be safely bestowed. Ill-health, which makes most people selfish, has not been able to spoil *my* nephew.

JAMES. Poor Robert, he is certainly a martyr to indisposition. [*Struck by an idea.*] Do you think, Aunt Clara, that the air of Norwood really agrees with him?

AUNT CLARA. I have not noticed that his health grows any worse.

JAMES [*eagerly*]. Oh yes, it does. He *pines*, Aunt Clara, positively *pines* for a more bracing air. The East Coast, for instance!

AUNT CLARA. Ah, James, always considerate. [*Complacently.*] But Robert will never go anywhere where he cannot constantly come and see me. *That* I am sure of. Indeed, it would not be good for him, he has so few distractions.

JAMES [*depressed*]. That's true. [*Walks down and turns, brightening again.*] But why shouldn't you go, too, Aunt Clara? I'm sure it can't be a good thing for *you* to remain in one place for so long together. Don't you think a change would do *you* good?

AUNT CLARA [*virtuously*]. I was never a gadabout. And I disapprove of this modern mania for change. Besides, with only my little annuity——

JAMES [*interrupting eagerly*]. Yes, yes, I know. [*Crosses to left of* AUNT CLARA.] But for Robert's sake? You might take him with you, and of course I should be delighted to contribute——

AUNT CLARA [*patting his shoulder affectionately*]. No, no, James. Your heart is ever generous, but in this case there is really no necessity. The air here suits me excellently, and Robert is quite as well as can be expected. Besides, there is Margaret to be thought of. I could not leave *her!*

JAMES. I'll look after Margaret.

AUNT CLARA. I am sure you would. I know how devoted you are to her. But Margaret likes to have her own family about her.

JAMES [*ruefully*]. So she does.

[*Crosses to writing-table and sits down.*]

AUNT CLARA [*affectionately*]. So you mustn't think *any* more about this. It was generous of you to propose it,

but I am *quite* contented here. Living in your house, James, with Robert and Constantia coming in *every* day, I have everything that I need for happiness. [*Wipes tear from her eye.*] Ah, here is Robert.

Enter ROBERT, *a cadaverous shambling man of five and thirty.*

ROBERT [*nods to* JAMES]. Good morning, Aunt Clara. You weren't down for lunch.

AUNT CLARA. No, I had a little soup in my room. I had a bad night.

ROBERT [*sitting on settee, gloomily*]. Ah, *my* insomnia is chronic.

AUNT CLARA [*bravely*]. But we must not complain. On the whole my health is wonderfully good.

ROBERT. I wish I could say that. After the Otaheite mission meeting last night I felt positively faint.

AUNT CLARA. Did you see James?

ROBERT. No, was he there?

AUNT CLARA. Of course. You know his interest in Otaheite.

JAMES [*hastily*]. Oh, in a large meeting like that it is so easy to miss a face.

ROBERT [*in a hard voice*]. I shouldn't have called it a large meeting.

JAMES [*hurriedly*]. Relatively large! Of course it wasn't *crowded.*

ROBERT. I should think not. Why, there were scarcely a hundred people there.

JAMES [*judicially*]. Indeed? I should have thought more than a *hundred.* [*To* AUNT CLARA, *with rapid change of subject.*] Shall I begin to read to you again, Aunt Clara?

AUNT CLARA. Not now, thank you, it is almost time for my walk.

ROBERT. By the way, James, I have here an appeal

for a good object which may well claim your support. The Mahommedan Conversion Fund. A most deserving field.

JAMES [*irritably*]. Oh, come, I hardly think we need go as far as the Mahommedans to find a deserving object.

ROBERT. I don't see that. After all, Arabia is nearer than Otaheite.

JAMES [*indifferently*]. I dare say.

ROBERT. And as you took the trouble to go to the meeting last night—I can't think how I came to miss you there; by the by, where were you sitting?—I should have thought——

JAMES [*rising hastily and going over to him*]. My dear fellow, you're quite right. Converting the Mahommedans is a most useful field. Leave me that paper and I'll look through it. [*Takes paper and turns away.*

Enter MARGARET *with* AUNT CLARA'S *bonnet and shawl.*

Hullo, Maggie. Been lying down? [*Kisses her.*]

MARGARET. For half an hour.
The sun is shining brightly now, Aunt Clara. Hadn't you better have your walk?

AUNT CLARA. I hardly feel up to it.

JAMES [*going up to her chair*]. Oh yes, I really think you should, just a turn or two in the garden.

[*Helps her to rise.*

AUNT CLARA. Very well, perhaps a few steps. [*Is helped into bonnet and shawl.*] And which of my dear nephews shall escort me? [*Beaming.*] James, I think.

JAMES [*hastily*]. No, no, Aunt. Robert shall go with you while I look through this Mahommedan Appeal.

AUNT CLARA [*much touched at this fresh evidence of self-denial*]. Ah, James, always willing to deny yourself. Come, Robert.

ROBERT [*rising heavily*]. Very well. Perhaps a gentle walk will do me good. [*Exit* AUNT CLARA *to garden supported by* ROBERT.]

[MARGARET *escorts both as far as window.* JAMES *with a sigh of relief goes to writing-table with Mahommedan Appeal, eyes it with strong disfavour, glances at a page or two, then with a wry face takes out cheque book and writes cheque.* MARGARET *returning from window goes to him, and noticing his depression, lays hand on shoulder.*]

MARGARET. Tired, dear?

JAMES. A little.

[*There is a pause, during which* MARGARET *pats* JAMES *affectionately on shoulder while he fidgets with paper-knife.*]

JAMES [*diffidently*]. Don't you think, Maggie, that Aunt Clara might *sometimes* go and stay with some one else?

MARGARET [*puzzled*]. Whom can she stay with?

JAMES [*hopelessly*]. That's just it, whom indeed!

MARGARET. You see she *has* no one except us—and Constantia.

JAMES. That wouldn't be much change for her! Constantia's always here anyhow.

MARGARET [*gently*]. Not much change certainly.

[*There is another perceptible pause.*

JAMES [*with an effort*]. Well then, Robert? Don't you think he might come *rather* less frequently?

MARGARET. My dear! He only comes to luncheon occasionally.

JAMES. Half a dozen times a week.

MARGARET. No, no, James, only three or four.

JAMES. Is that all? It seems oftener!

MARGARET [*kneels by him, fondling his hair*]. What's the matter with you, dear? You seem out of spirits.

JAMES [*taking her hand and pressing it*]. It's nothing. Only we never seem to get any time to ourselves, do we?

MARGARET. Not very much, perhaps.

JAMES. And it would certainly be more comfortable if we did, eh, little girl? [*Looking up at her face.*

MARGARET [*gently*]. But we mustn't think only of *comfort*, must we?

JAMES. What an angel you are!

[*Takes her hand and kisses it.*

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT. Mrs. Richard Wetherby.

JAMES. Confound!

Enter CONSTANTIA, *an imposing figure, handsomely dressed in black, rather as if she had gone into half mourning to mark her sense of her separation from her husband.*

MARGARET [*putting hand over his mouth*]. Hush! [*Rises to greet her sister.*] Good afternoon, Connie. [*Kisses her.*]

[*They meet.* CONSTANTIA *crosses to* JAMES *after kissing* MARGARET.]

JAMES [*rising*]. How are you?

CONSTANTIA [*in her elaborate manner*]. Thank you, James, I am tolerably well. Has Richard arrived yet?

JAMES. Not yet.

CONSTANTIA. I am glad of that. I would rather be here to receive him. I shall feel more *at home*.

[JAMES *makes a face, which* MARGARET *observes, and turns towards garden window.*]

MARGARET. Aunt Clara is in the garden.

JAMES [*hurriedly*]. Yes. She has just gone out with Robert. [*Insinuatingly.*] Oughtn't you to go and say "How do you do" to her?

CONSTANTIA. Very well. Perhaps I had better do so. I shall not be long.

JAMES [*as soon as she is out of the room*]. Pray don't hurry. [*Exit* CONSTANTIA *to garden. There is a third significant pause during which* MARGARET *crosses to settee.*

JAMES *comes to her, repossesses himself of her hand, and quietly sits by her side.*] [*Reflectively.*] I suppose it wouldn't be possible to get Constantia to *move*, would it?

MARGARET. Move?

JAMES. Yes, go away from Norwood altogether.

MARGARET. Oh no, she likes being near us.

JAMES [*gloomily*]. I was afraid so.

MARGARET [*kissing him*]. How silly you are this afternoon. I've never seen you like this before. Why shouldn't Connie live near us?

JAMES [*petulantly*]. Why *should* she? Why doesn't she go and live with her husband like other women?

MARGARET. With Richard? But you know her principles.

JAMES [*bored*]. Here's another of them.

MARGARET [*not understanding*]. What, dear?

JAMES [*recovering himself*]. Nothing. Only I seem to have heard rather a lot about principles to-day.

MARGARET. As a member of the Married Woman's Protection League, Constantia naturally has a high ideal of a husband's duty to his wife. A very high ideal. So has Aunt Clara. So has Robert.

JAMES. They're a remarkably unanimous family.

MARGARET. Constantia would have considered it *wrong* to condone Richard's infidelity.

JAMES. There was no proof that Dick was unfaithful.

MARGARET. What other explanation could there be of his late hours, his constant absences from home?

JAMES. Was he ever asked to explain them?

MARGARET. Of course. Constantia *never* allowed Richard to be out after midnight without demanding an explanation. She felt it to be her duty.

JAMES. What did Dick say?

MARGARET. He *laughed* at her. [JAMES *shows a tendency to laugh also.*] Jim! I believe you're laughing too!

JAMES. Well, the interviews must have been rather comic. Constantia proclaiming the rights of women and the wickedness of husbands, and old Dick grinning away on the hearthrug. [*Begins to laugh again.*

MARGARET [*shocked*]. Oh, Jim! I never thought you would make a joke of such a thing.

JAMES [*pulling himself up*]. No! No! Dick didn't behave at all well. Still, I think Constantia might have managed him better.

MARGARET. Constantia never attempted to *manage* her husband. She had too much sense of her own dignity. She merely insisted upon her rights.

JAMES. Rather a maddening attitude that?

MARGARET. Richard was in fault.

JAMES. Perhaps there were faults on Constantia's side as well.

MARGARET [*pained*]. Oh, Jim, I thought you never judged people harshly.

JAMES. No, no, dear. You misunderstand me. I only mean that perhaps Constantia did not show Dick much affection. She's not what you would call a demonstrative woman.

MARGARET [*gently*]. I don't think she ever failed in her duty.

JAMES. A woman must do a lot more than her duty if she's to make her husband happy.

MARGARET. Richard did not make her happy either, you know.

JAMES. That's it, you see! They're quits.

MARGARET [*affectionately*]. It's like you, dear, to try and defend Richard. You always make the best of everybody. Still he was greatly to blame.

JAMES. I'm afraid he was. [*Slight pause.*] But you won't do anything to prevent a reconciliation, will you?

MARGARET. No. But you mustn't ask me to encourage it.

JAMES [*rises and comes forward*]. Well, let's hope they'll patch it up between them to-day. She's not seen Dick for a year. And she must have been fond of him once.

MARGARET. What does Robert think?

JAMES [*hastily*]. Oh, I don't think we need consult Robert.

MARGARET. By the way, Robert and I are going to the great meeting at Lambeth to-night in aid of the Bishop's Sustentation Fund. We shall dine in town. You won't mind?

JAMES. What about Dick? He'll be here.

MARGARET. It is because of Richard that I am going. I was afraid it might seem rather marked if I were out the only night he's dining here, but what was I to do?

JAMES [*briefly*]. Not go, I suppose.

MARGARET. I couldn't do that. Of course, I don't want to hurt Richard's feelings, but I would rather not sit at table with a man who is living apart from his wife.

JAMES. I should have thought it was no worse to sit at table with a man who is separated from his wife than with a wife who is separated from her husband. Constantia is here often enough!

MARGARET [*slightly scandalised*]. The cases are hardly parallel.

JAMES. I should think they weren't! Considering that your sister is here all day and every day, I think you might manage to meet my brother at dinner once a year.

MARGARET [*pause, rises*]. I'm sorry you're vexed, dear. I hoped you wouldn't mind. [*Pause.*] However, it doesn't matter. I'll tell Robert I've changed my plans, and he and I will both have dinner with you here before the meeting.

JAMES. Heaven forbid! Robert was here at luncheon. He will be here to tea. I'm hanged if he shall dine here as well!

MARGARET. Well, dear, what can I do? I can't very well disappoint Robert. It would be unkind.

JAMES [*remorsefully*]. What a brute I am! [*Kisses her.*] Of course you mustn't. Dine in town by all means. I'll make your excuses to Dick, and we'll go round to the club after dinner and play billiards. There, dear, I'm sorry I was cross. I suppose I'm out of sorts or something.

[*Crosses to table.*

MARGARET [*crosses to* JAMES *and caresses him*]. Poor Jim! You won't mind dining alone with him, will you?

JAMES. Of course not, he won't eat me. Besides, I shall have Aunt Clara.

MARGARET. Yes, I was forgetting Aunt Clara.

JAMES. Happy woman! [*Sits.*

MARGARET [*laughing*]. You're evidently not well at all. I shall send for Dr. Long, and he'll give you some horrid medicine. That Otaheite meeting was over ever so late last night. I expect that tired you.

[*They embrace.*

Enter by window CONSTANTIA, AUNT CLARA *and* ROBERT. ROBERT *enters behind* AUNT CLARA, *who leans on* CONSTANTIA'S *left arm. He stands by the window gloomily observing the embrace, then turns away.* MARGARET *moves the arm-chair a little.* CONSTANTIA, *after depositing* AUNT CLARA, *comes to the settee.* MARGARET *goes to the window.*

JAMES [*ruefully*]. Interrupted again!

[*Rises, and crosses the room.*

[CONSTANTIA *seats herself on settee.* AUNT CLARA *is in arm-chair. The latter resumes her crochet,* ROBERT *moons about.*]

ROBERT [*looking at watch*]. Half-past four. Time for tea.

JAMES. Dick will be here directly.

ROBERT [*unctuously*]. I'm afraid this will be a very painful meeting for all of us.

JAMES. That reminds me. I expect, Constantia, you'd rather have your interview with Richard in private? [*to* CONSTANTIA, *standing between her and* ROBERT.]

ROBERT [*interrupting*]. I hardly think——

JAMES. My dear Robert, will you kindly allow Constantia to decide for herself? [*To* CONSTANTIA.] Well?

CONSTANTIA. Thank you, James, I think that will certainly be the best arrangement.

JAMES. Very well, then. [*Crosses to fireplace and stands back to fire—rings bell.*] Jane shall show Dick into the library. Margaret and I will go there and give him some tea. You, Aunt Clara and Robert will have tea here. After tea I will bring Dick here and leave you to have your talk with him in private.

Enter MAID.

When Mr. Richard comes show him into the library, and let me know.

MAID. Very well, sir. [*Exit.*

ROBERT. You are sure you would not rather have some one at hand?

CONSTANTIA. Pray do not be ridiculous, Robert. I trust I am able to conduct an interview with my husband without outside assistance.

JAMES. Of course! And I hope the result will be to bring you together again.

[CONSTANTIA *bows coldly.*]

AUNT CLARA. James!

JAMES [*hastily*]. That is, of course, if you are conscientiously able to forgive him.

ROBERT [*rises—grunts*]. By the way, James, about that Mahommedan Appeal——

JAMES [*impatiently*]. Oh yes, I've looked through it. There's a cheque in my pocket somewhere. Here it is. [*Hands it to him.*

ROBERT [*sitting, after examining the amount*]. Thank you, James, I felt sure the good work would find a supporter in you.

JAMES. Yes, yes, of course. Always glad to do what I can. [*The front door bell rings.*] Ah, that must be Dick. Ready, Maggie? [*To* CONSTANTIA.] Then you will see Dick alone here in, say, ten minutes.

MAID *enters.*

MAID. Mr. Richard is in the library, sir.

JAMES. Very well. Take him some tea and bring some here. Come, Maggie.

Exeunt MARGARET *and* JAMES.

AUNT CLARA [*seated by fireplace*]. It must be very painful for dear James to meet his brother in these distressing circumstances. If only Richard were more like him. But the two brothers are *quite* different!

[*Shakes her head mournfully.*

ROBERT. Richard is by nature incurably frivolous and vicious.

CONSTANTIA [*calmly*]. I do not think anything is to be gained by exaggerating my husband's failings.

Enter JANE *with tea. Moves table a little, puts down tea-tray, and brings down chair and puts it behind table.*

There was always a regrettable levity about his behaviour which showed a tendency to increase with years. And, of course, his moral character is scandalous. [*Goes over to tea-table.*] But, these defects are not necessarily incurable. Tea, Aunt Clara?

AUNT CLARA. Thank you.

CONSTANTIA. Take this to Aunt Clara, Robert.

[ROBERT *rises heavily from chair, gets tea and crosses to* AUNT CLARA.

AUNT CLARA. I am afraid Richard's disposition always lacked the note of seriousness which is so beautiful in James. [*Takes tea.*]—Thank you, Robert—I remember people used to joke about it. They called Richard "The bad Mr. Wetherby" and James "The good Mr. Wetherby."

[ROBERT *stands by arm-chair.*

CONSTANTIA. I remember. However, our separation will have sobered him, no doubt. [*Gives* ROBERT *his tea.*

AUNT CLARA. Let us hope so, my dear.

ROBERT [*taking bread-and-butter*]. Have you made up your mind what attitude to adopt towards him? If I might advise I should urge that you receive his advances with the utmost reserve. [*Sits down on settee.*

AUNT CLARA. Yes, Robert is right. Do not allow your heart to betray you into any course which your reason would not approve.

CONSTANTIA [*calmly helping herself to cake*]. I think you may count on me not to err in *that* direction.

AUNT CLARA. I am glad to hear it. Modern wives are far too ready to forgive their husbands. It is the cause of many unhappy homes.

CONSTANTIA [*calmly*]. I did not say I shall *not* forgive Richard.

AUNT CLARA. My dear!

CONSTANTIA. On the contrary. It is my intention to forgive him this afternoon, after he has duly expressed contrition and asked for forgiveness.

AUNT CLARA. But can you be sure that his repentance is sincere?

CONSTANTIA [*philosophically*]. Of course there can be no certainty in these things. But I see every reason why it should be. He must have felt our separation acutely. In the early days of our marriage Richard was by no means without tenderness.

ROBERT [*in a hollow voice*]. Constantia, is this wise?

[*He takes bread-and-butter.*

CONSTANTIA. I think so. After all, Richard is my husband. And I have not found my position since I decided to live apart from him altogether an agreeable one. Socially indeed it has great inconveniences. [*Rises and takes* AUNT CLARA'S *cup and places it on tray—seating herself again.*] More tea, Aunt?

AUNT CLARA [*making gesture of dissent*]. Well, my dear, of course you must do what your *conscience* tells you to be right.

CONSTANTIA. Exactly. I shall not pardon him too quickly. I shall just yield gradually to his protestations. [*Eats some cake delicately.*] After all, a year is a long time, and it is better to err on the side of leniency. [*Pours herself out more tea.*] A year ago, I felt obliged to leave Richard —I could not endure his heartless behaviour. Indeed a wife who condones her husband's irregularities is wanting in her duty. And at the time I intended never to return to him. But one must not be vindictive. And the position of a woman who is separated from her husband is not a comfortable one. It has all the disadvantages of widowhood without its compensations. Yes, on the whole I think Richard has been punished long enough. More tea, Robert?

ROBERT [*rising, and bringing his cup*]. I fear you are leaning unduly towards mercy. [*Pause.*] I greatly fear it.

[CONSTANTIA *pours out* ROBERT'S *tea. He takes it and sits down again, taking bread-and-butter.*]

CONSTANTIA. I am willing to take the risk. At least I shall feel that I have done what is right in forgiving my husband. Besides, there are practical matters to be considered, the loss of income and so forth. When I left Richard I had to move into a smaller house and make other heavy sacrifices. The allowance he makes me, though sufficient, is considerably smaller than the income I enjoyed as his wife.

AUNT CLARA. I don't think you must allow that to weigh with you. After all what is money?

ROBERT [*unctuously*]. What indeed!

[*He takes more bread-and-butter.*

CONSTANTIA [*frigidly*]. My dear Robert, of course I am above all *sordid* considerations in this matter. I shall do what I consider right in any circumstances. But there is no use in shutting one's eyes to things.

AUNT CLARA [*dismally*]. Well, well, my dear, I trust you will not find you have made a mistake.

CONSTANTIA [*coldly*]. I do not usually make mistakes, I believe. I shall forgive Richard this afternoon after he has expressed his regret in suitable terms. Of course I shall speak to him very seriously and caution him as to his future conduct. But afterwards I shall forgive him.

Enter MARGARET.

MARGARET [*at door*]. Richard will come to you now, Connie, if you are ready to see him.

CONSTANTIA. Very well.

[*Pours herself out some tea.*

MARGARET [*going to* AUNT CLARA *and helping her to rise*]. Come, Aunt Clara. Let me take you to your room. [*To* ROBERT.] I think you had better go now, Robert.

ROBERT. Certainly. [*Putting cup on chiffonnier and finishing bread-and-butter.*] [*Exit* ROBERT *sulkily.*

MARGARET [*at door*]. Jim will bring Richard to you in a minute or two. [*Exit with* AUNT CLARA.

[CONSTANTIA *puts down her cup directly they leave, rises, but hearing voices, sits on settee. There is an appreciable pause. Then enter* JAMES *and* DICK. *The latter is a handsome, careless, jovial-looking man of five-and-thirty, very cheerful and quite at his ease.*]

DICK [*going up to* CONSTANTIA *and shaking hands*]. How do you do, Con? Pretty well, I hope?

CONSTANTIA. Thank you. I am quite well.

DICK [*cheerfully*]. That's right.

JAMES [*at door*]. Now I'll leave you two together. You may have things to talk of alone. [*Going.*

DICK. Not at all, my dear fellow. Stay by all means. Con and I have no secrets.

JAMES [*awkwardly*]. But I think——

[*Going again.*

DICK. Nonsense, Jim. Sit down. What on earth *should* we have to talk about? Don't be absurd.

JAMES [*still going*]. Oh, but—Constantia said she would prefer to speak to you alone.

DICK. Ah, that's different. If Con has anything private to say to me I'm agreeable. I always am. Off with you. I say, what time's dinner? [*Goes up to* JAMES.

JAMES. Seven. By the way, Margaret asks you to excuse her. She has to dine out.

DICK. All right. [*Nods cheerily to* JAMES, *who goes out.*] Well, Con, what have you got to say to *me*, eh?

CONSTANTIA [*with dignity*]. Have *you* nothing to say to *me*, Richard?

DICK. I think not. Nothing special.

CONSTANTIA. Then I hardly see the object of this meeting.

DICK [*cheerily*]. Nor do I. But *you* arranged it, you know.

CONSTANTIA [*stiffly*]. Pardon me!

DICK. No? Ah yes, I remember. You suggested every six months. I thought once a year quite sufficient. You see I was right. [*Crosses behind settee.*

CONSTANTIA [*majestically*]. This is not an occasion for levity.

DICK. My remark was not intentionally humorous.

[*There is a pause during which* CONSTANTIA *shows signs of impatience.* DICK, *quite at his ease, strolls over to fire and warms himself. Presently he takes up framed photograph of* JAMES *which stands conspicuously on mantelpiece.*]

I say, what a beastly picture of old Jim! Don't you think so? [*Holds it up.*

CONSTANTIA [*icily*]. It seems to me a satisfactory likeness.

DICK. No, it's so smug and solemn. Poor old chap, I expect he has a pretty boring time of it down here, eh?

CONSTANTIA [*with elaborate sarcasm*]. I have not heard him complain.

DICK. I dare say not. He's a patient sort of chap is old Jim. [*Shakes his head at photograph as he puts it back on mantelpiece. Then seats himself in arm-chair. There is another awkward pause.*]

DICK. By the way, do you still like living in Norwood, Con? *Ghastly* sort of place I used to think it.

CONSTANTIA. It suits me well enough. I like to be near Margaret and James.

DICK. Ah! Do *they* like that?

CONSTANTIA. Certainly.

DICK. Oh! [*A pause.*] You're tolerably contented then, take it all together?

[CONSTANTIA *bows.*]

That's right. So am I.

CONSTANTIA. Of course a wife who is separated from her husband can never be very happy.

DICK. No doubt. But a husband who isn't separated from his wife can be tolerably miserable too.

CONSTANTIA. Yes, marriage is a tragedy.

DICK. Just so, with comic relief.

CONSTANTIA [*impatiently*]. Pray be serious.

DICK. My dear Con, I *never* am serious. Why on earth should I be?

CONSTANTIA. Don't you understand that by adopting this frivolous tone you are letting a golden opportunity slip?

DICK. No. Hang me if I do.

CONSTANTIA [*rising with dignity*]. Then no good can come of our continuing this interview.

DICK [*rising also*]. Of course not. What did you expect?

CONSTANTIA [*exasperated*]. I expected that you would at least have seen the propriety of expressing regret for your past conduct and promising amendment in the future.

DICK. What would have been the use of that?

CONSTANTIA [*bitterly*]. Oh, nothing. Nothing that interests you at all, I suppose. Only it might have led to a reconciliation between us.

DICK [*by fire, raising his eyebrows*]. I see. [*Deliberately.*] I confess that possibility had *not* occurred to me!

CONSTANTIA [*stiffly*]. Indeed!

DICK [*politely*]. Still, it's very good of you to suggest it.

CONSTANTIA [*turning hotly*]. I did *not* suggest it.

DICK. Oh! I thought you did.

CONSTANTIA [*angrily*]. What I said was that had *you* suggested it——

DICK. Yes, yes, of course. What I should have said was it would have been very good of *me* to suggest it. No, that's not right either. Still, I appreciate the generosity of your offer.

CONSTANTIA [*crossly*]. I made no offer.

DICK. Dear me, I'm afraid I express myself very clumsily.

CONSTANTIA [*savagely*]. You certainly do.

[*Sits on settee.*

DICK [*crosses near settee. Blandly*]. You must put it down to excess of emotion. When a man has been separated from his wife for a year, and there is a suggestion

—if that is the right word—that she *might* return to his roof he naturally feels it acutely. The *affection* implied in such a proposal—no, not proposal, hypothesis—is very moving.

CONSTANTIA. I said nothing about affection.

DICK. But it was surely implied?

CONSTANTIA [*sternly*]. No, Richard. Please understand that my—— [*Pauses for word.*

DICK [*sweetly*]. Mention?

CONSTANTIA. —my mention of a reconciliation was in no way due to affection. Had I returned to you it would have been solely because I considered it my *duty.*

DICK [*insinuatingly*]. Is that *quite* a satisfactory foundation for domestic happiness?

CONSTANTIA [*impatiently*]. I was not thinking of *happiness.* [*There is a pause.*

DICK [*calmly*]. Well, Con, I won't ask you to make such a sacrifice.

CONSTANTIA [*virtuously*]. I don't mind sacrificing myself.

DICK [*quietly*]. Ah! *I* do!

CONSTANTIA [*rising angrily*]. Then there's nothing more to be said.

DICK [*holding out hand*]. Except "good-bye," Con—till next year.

[CONSTANTIA *refuses hand and sweeps out with dignity.* DICK *stands looking after her with a grim smile. The front door closes sharply.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*The Dining-room at the* JAMES WETHERBYS'. *Dinner is half over. At the table in the middle of stage are* AUNT CLARA, *facing audience,* JAMES *at one end,* DICK *at the other. The side of table next the audience is empty. The room is the conventional suburban dining-room; windows curtained behind* AUNT CLARA, *side-board behind* DICK, *fireplace flanked by two leather easy chairs behind* JAMES. *Door on the left.*

Pause. The MAID *hands two sweets.* JAMES, *who looks bored and ill, helps* AUNT CLARA *to jelly.* DICK *helps himself.* JAMES *refuses.*

DICK. My dear chap, you eat nothing. [*Attacks jelly on his plate.*] Does he, Aunt Clara?

AUNT CLARA [*coldly*]. James has never a large appetite.

JAMES. I'm not hungry to-night.

DICK. That's bad. [*Filling his mouth.*] There's nothing like *eating*! It helps a man through life wonderfully.

JAMES. No doubt.

DICK. In fact it's very morbid not to eat. It's not at all a thing to give way to. [*To* MAID.] Bring me some more of that. [*Helps himself.*

JAMES. My dear Dick, what nonsense you talk.

DICK. I dare say. If *you* talked more nonsense you wouldn't look so beastly seedy. Eh, Aunt Clara? [*Attacks food.*

AUNT CLARA [*coldly*]. I had not noticed that James was looking unwell.

DICK. He does though. And he looks beastly *serious*

too. That's bad. A man should never be serious at meals. Indeed, I'm not sure he should ever be serious at all.

[MAID *takes* JAMES'S *and* AUNT CLARA'S *sweet plates and puts two cheese plates.*]

AUNT CLARA. Really, Richard! Considering the solemn cause which brought you here to-day——

DICK. Yes, Constantia *is* solemn, isn't she? That's why we didn't get on.

[MAID *changes plates during this scene, afterwards hands biscuits and cheese.*]

AUNT CLARA [*severely*]. It is a pity you are not more like her.

[MAID *gives* DICK *cheese plate.*]

DICK. That's what I never can understand about you solemn people. You're all propagandists. You're not only as solemn as owls yourselves—you want everybody else to be solemn too.

JAMES. Oh come, *you* were preaching the virtue of talking nonsense just now.

DICK. So I was. But only to you, Jim.

[*Takes cheese, which the other two refuse.*

You see I *like* you. But Aunt Clara doesn't like me. [*To* AUNT CLARA.] Oh no, you don't. So why on earth she should want to convert me to anything I don't know.

[*Eats his cheese and biscuit.*

AUNT CLARA. I do not expect *you* to appreciate my motives.

[DICK *grins.*]

JAMES. Aunt Clara means that you aren't an altruist, Dick.

[MAID *removes plates, brushes cloth and puts on dessert during this scene, then Exit.*]

DICK. No, I'm not. But I've got a good temper and a rattling good digestion. That's enough for *me*.

JAMES. Is this the way you used to talk to Constantia?

DICK. Yes.

JAMES. Then I don't wonder she left you.

[DICK *laughs.*]

AUNT CLARA [*rising*]. I cannot be a witness to any more of this levity.

DICK [*genially*]. Don't go, Aunt Clara. Stay till after dessert.

AUNT CLARA. No, I will not—I never eat dessert at night. James, give me your arm.

[JAMES *and* DICK *both rise.* DICK *opens door.* JAMES *helps* AUNT CLARA *out. When he returns* DICK *is back in his chair, cracking nuts and pouring himself out a glass of port.*]

JAMES. What a brute you are, Dick! You've made Aunt Clara furious.

DICK. Very sorry, my dear chap. I did my best to amuse her.

JAMES [*grimly*]. Well, you didn't succeed. She's gone straight to bed in a tearing rage.

DICK. Fiery old lady! Nuts, Jim?

JAMES. No, thanks.

DICK [*taking some more, then looking at* JAMES *keenly but kindly*]. My dear old man, what's the matter? You really do look awfully pulled down.

JAMES. Nothing. We were rather late last night. Perhaps it's that.

DICK [*laughing softly to himself*]. Yes. How did you account for the fact *here*?

JAMES [*with a wry face*]. As usual—Missionary Meeting—I nearly got found out, by the way.

DICK. How was that?

JAMES. That fool Robert. He was there too. It

wasn't a crowded house apparently, and he can't make out how he didn't spot me.

[DICK *laughs more.*]

That's right ! [*With a snarl.*] *Laugh* away ! I suppose it *is* funny—to you.

DICK. I should think it was.

JAMES. It isn't to *me*. It makes me *sick*. Fancy a man of my age who has to pretend to his wife that he's been to a cursed missionary meeting because he can't tell her he was amusing himself at your club playing cards.

DICK. Why didn't you tell her ?

JAMES [*crossly*]. How can I ? She'd never forgive me. Margaret's a dear little girl and she's awfully fond of me, but she's tremendously strict in her ideas. Besides, I've got such a confoundedly high character to live up to. If I were just an ordinary person, I dare say she wouldn't be so much shocked. Margaret's not a fool. But she's got it into her head that I'm a sort of saint, and to please her I've got into the habit of pretending to be one, and now I can't give it up. Was there ever such a beastly tangle ?

DICK. Why not make a clean breast of it ?

JAMES. I can't, I tell you. It would be bad enough merely to have to tell her that I'm not the good young man they all think me down here. But I should have to own that I'd been deceiving her almost ever since our marriage. She'd never be able to respect me again, and I should never be able to respect myself. [*Bitterly.*] Indeed, I can't do that *now*.

DICK. My dear chap, you take the whole thing too seriously.

Door opens—enter MAID.

JAMES. Hush ! here's coffee.

[*Coffee is handed—exit* MAID.

DICK [*reflectively*]. It must be a curious thing being so highly thought of—especially by one's wife!

JAMES [*crossly*]. Well, you needn't *sneer* at it.

DICK. I wasn't. Still, it seems odd—to me. What did they think of your asking me down here?

JAMES. Aunt Clara was rather shocked. But she puts it all down to my high principles.

DICK. How does she manage that?

JAMES. I'm supposed to be such a thoroughly saintly character that I can't judge anyone harshly. Even a beast like you.

DICK. Ho! Ho!

JAMES. Yes. That's *one* advantage in having a good reputation. Whatever you do, people always attribute it to the loftiest motives. If you ask a fellow who's a bad lot to dinner, it's supposed to be because you've such a forgiving disposition. *You* can't say that!

DICK. I don't want to, my dear fellow. And after all, a bad reputation and a good reputation amount to pretty much the same thing in the end.

JAMES [*disgusted*]. I'm hanged if they do.

DICK. Oh yes. *You* can dine with whom you please because you've such a high character. *I* can dine with whom *I* please because I've no character at all. My position is every bit as good as yours. Indeed, I prefer it.

[*Takes cigar and pushes case across to* JAMES.

JAMES [*shocked*]. Ah, you've no conscience.

DICK. No. Have you a match?

JAMES. Here you are.

[*Gets match-box from mantelpiece.*

DICK. Won't you smoke?

JAMES. No. Margaret doesn't like it.

DICK. Poor chap! [*Lights cigar.*] By the way, don't you find the high moral game rather fatiguing?

JAMES [*sighing*]. Sometimes.

DICK. I thought so. That's why you're looking so fagged.

JAMES [*complainingly*]. And yet I'm not naturally a hypocrite. I'd like to be as straightforward as the day. But circumstances were against me. When I fell in love with Margaret I really did give up all the old bachelor ways. She was so good [*enthusiastically*], so wonderfully good and sweet, and I determined I'd be like her. For a time I *was* like her. It was uphill work, but I was.

[DICK *grins.*]

What are you *grinning* at?

DICK. Nothing. Go on.

JAMES. Of course she thought me a perfect saint. I *was* a perfect saint, in fact. And so we were married and came to live down here. And after a time—six months or so—I found I couldn't keep it up. I wanted amusement. But by that time I was saddled with my ghastly reputation. And I've been groaning under it ever since.

DICK. Much better have told her.

JAMES [*irritably, fidgeting with cigar-case which remains on table all through scene*]. I couldn't. Margaret believed in me; so did they all. I couldn't undeceive them. It would have been simply brutal.

DICK. So you took to hypocrisy.

JAMES [*savagely*]. Oh well, you needn't get *virtuous* over it.

DICK [*calmly*]. Not at all, my dear chap.

JAMES [*grumbling*]. It isn't as if I'd been anything very bad. I'm not a vicious man. I only wanted to amuse myself—music-halls, an occasional race meeting, a game of cards at the club. If she'd only thought me just an ordinary sort of chap, I'd have told her fast enough. But with *my* character! Good Lord!

DICK. You'd much better have adopted my system. [*Rises.*

JAMES [*snappishly*]. *Your* system!

DICK. You needn't sniff at it. It's a lot better than yours.

JAMES. What *is* your system?

DICK [*getting up from table*]. It's very simple. And it's based upon the easiest of all the virtues—Truth!

JAMES. Pshaw!

DICK. Oh yes, it is. [*Goes over to fire, selects arm-chair and seats himself lazily.*] I hate pretending things. It's such a *fag*. So I've gone in for perfect frankness. In fact, I may say I've carried frankness to a fine art.

JAMES. What rot!

DICK. 'Tisn't rot at all, my dear chap, and so you'd have found if you'd tried it. Truth's a splendid thing in married life. It keeps a home together wonderfully.

JAMES [*sarcastically*]. You seem to have found it so!

DICK [*easily*]. Oh, it sometimes breaks one up too. But it's awfully useful either way.

JAMES. I'm glad you think so.

DICK. You see, in marriage what one has to aim at is a quiet life. *You* tried to get it by pretending to be as good as Margaret thought you. *That* wasn't very successful. *I* tried to get it by never pretending anything at all. The result has exceeded my most sanguine expectations.

JAMES [*ironically*]. You're easily satisfied.

DICK. That's my beautiful nature! After I married Constantia I found she hadn't the same *ideals* as I had, not the same *ideals* at all.

JAMES. *Your* ideals!

DICK. Come, my dear chap, *your* ideals haven't shown up particularly well. As I was saying, Con and I wanted different things. She liked regular hours, church on Sunday, afternoon tea parties, bazaars, that ass Robert and his subscription lists, Aunt Clara and her crochet—by the way, how do *you* like Aunt Clara?

JAMES. Hang Aunt Clara! [*Rises irritably and begins to put away decanters into sideboard in a restless manner.*]

DICK [*blandly*]. That's exactly what I said. Well, I soon realised that either Constantia's view of life must prevail or mine. I rebelled—late hours, golf on Sundays, no tea parties, no bazaars, no Robert, no Aunt Clara. Before long I had established a reputation as a complete libertine and was allowed to do as I pleased.

JAMES. I remember. Your conduct was disgraceful.

DICK. Not at all, my dear fellow. I never did anything bad. I'm no more vicious than you are. My bad reputation is as hollow as your good one. We're both frauds together.

JAMES [*impatiently*]. Anyhow, Constantia believed you were vicious.

DICK. Yes. That was part of my system. In this world, Jim, if you aren't always going about saying you're very good, people end by believing you're very bad. That was what happened to me with Constantia.

JAMES [*crosses to table, and leans against chair*]. You deceived her then.

DICK. No, Constantia deceived herself. [*Airily.*] I took no interest at all in the matter.

JAMES [*scornfully*]. Well, the result was a pretty abject fiasco.

DICK. Fiasco ! Why, it was a triumph ! Constantia sulked for six months and then announced her intention of leaving me. For once my perfect candour deserted me. I feigned distress. But it would scarcely have been decent to do otherwise, eh ?

[JAMES *makes inarticulate murmur of reprobation.*]

So one auspicious day the lawyers were called in, an amicable separation was arranged, the parties to meet once a year. And that's what brought me here to-day.

JAMES [*indignantly*]. I think it's perfectly shameful.

DICK [*laughing*]. Oh, come, look after the beam in your own eye, old man, and leave me my little mote.

JAMES [*disgusted*]. Don't joke about it. You're always joking.

DICK. That's why I keep so jolly well.

[*Rises, pushes* JAMES.

[JAMES *begins to laugh, finally bursts into a roar.*]

That's right, laugh away, old man, and thank Heaven this deadly lively place hasn't robbed you of the faculty.

[*From this point to end of scene* JAMES *grows increasingly cheerful and his gloom quite disappears. He goes over to fireplace.*]

JAMES [*sits in arm-chair*]. But don't you feel any remorse? Think of Constantia. You've ruined her life.

DICK. Not a bit of it. I know Constantia. She's as happy as possible. She doesn't know it, but she is. She's a good woman and she's got a grievance. What more can she want?

JAMES. Still, you made her life miserable while you *were* together.

DICK. Well, she made *my* life miserable too—at least she did her best. We're quits.

JAMES. Quits! Ha, ha! I remember that's what I said to Maggie. Do you know, Dick, I hoped you two might patch things up this afternoon and live together again.

DICK. No, thank you. I've no ill feeling towards Con. I even like her in a way. But I'm not going to live with her. Con is one of those characters who are much more admirable when you aren't married to them.

[*Crosses back to arm-chair above fireplace and sits.*

JAMES. You're quite happy as you are?

DICK. Quite! I sleep well, eat well—you don't, Jim—I make no pretence of being better than I am. Rather the contrary. And I find the world a very pleasant, amusing place.

JAMES. I wonder how you two ever came to marry?

DICK [*shrugging shoulders*]. Lunacy, I suppose! We

haven't a taste in common. Constantia has no sense of humour. *She* likes solemn asses like Robert. *I* don't. By the way, I suppose *you* see a good deal of Robert?

[JAMES *nods, laughing.*]

I thought so. And Aunt Clara?

JAMES. She lives with us.

DICK. Poor chap! Now, Jim, can you seriously imagine *my* having Aunt Clara to live with *me*? And Robert dropping in every day?

JAMES. I don't think I can.

DICK. Why don't you turn them out?

JAMES. My character!

DICK. Oh, it's *that* again, is it?

JAMES. I'm supposed to be so awfully kind and considerate and all that. That's the worst of it. If I were only a brute like you!

DICK [*triumphantly*]. *Now* you begin to see the point of having *no* character. Try it, old man. Try it in your bath, as the advertisements say.

JAMES [*ruefully*]. I can't. I've Margaret to think of.

DICK. She'd get over it—if she's really fond of you.

JAMES. I daren't face the risk.

DICK. You'd better.

JAMES [*peevishly*]. I *can't*, I tell you. No, I've got to go on in the old way with Aunt Clara permanently on the premises, Robert dropping in to collect subscriptions and Constantia living next door but one. And I've a reputation for amiability.

DICK. Poor old chap!

JAMES. 'Tisn't a pretty picture, is it?

DICK [*jumping up*]. Look here, Jim, you want rousing. You're simply perishing of dullness. Hang billiards! Let's run up to town for an hour, go to the Empire and amuse ourselves. We can be back by twelve!

[JAMES *shakes his head.*]

Half-past eleven then. Come along. [*Pulls him up out of chair.*] Why shouldn't we? It'll do you a world of good.

JAMES [*wavering*]. If Margaret heard of it——

DICK. She won't. After all, 'tisn't the first little jaunt you've had with me, without anybody being the wiser. You'll come? [*Pulls him out of chair by his arm.*

JAMES [*rising half unwillingly*]. I'm sure I oughtn't——

DICK. Bosh, old man! Come along. I'll look after you. How do the trains go from this confounded place?

JAMES. Pretty often. [*Looks at watch.*] We shall catch one now if we hurry.

DICK [*dashing out for hats and coats and returning immediately*]. Here, get into this. [*Flings him overcoat.*] Hurry up. [*Puts on his own.*]

JAMES. Well, just for an hour. I think I do need shaking up. I feel regularly depressed and out of sorts.

DICK [*dashing to table and pocketing his cigar-case*]. *Boredom*, my dear fellow. Strong men have died of it!

[*Takes his arm and hurries him out as Curtain falls.*

The Curtain descends for a moment. When it rises again the stage is dark. The scene is the same. Time, three hours later. The sound of a latch-key is heard in front door. Then footsteps in hall. Then dining-room door opens letting in shaft of light from hall. Enter MARGARET *and* ROBERT. MARGARET *turns up electric light, showing dining-room with cloth cleared and biscuits, syphon and glasses on table and whisky decanter on sideboard.*

MARGARET. They're not back yet. At least, I don't see Jim's hat and coat.

ROBERT. Where have they gone?

MARGARET. To the club, to play billiards.

ROBERT [*gloomily*]. They'll be late then.

[*Puts hat and stick on table.*

MARGARET. I think not.

ROBERT. You don't know Richard!

[*Crosses to fireplace.*

MARGARET [*comes down* L.]. Jim will bring him back in good time.

ROBERT. I wonder if it was wise leaving them together? The influence of a thoroughly depraved nature like Richard's is very insidious.

MARGARET. Oh, with Jim's high character——

ROBERT. Of course. Still, there's always a risk.

MARGARET [*with conviction*]. Not with Jim.

[*Sits at table.*

ROBERT [*goes to table and takes three or four biscuits, which he eats till end of scene by fireplace*]. It was curious that I did not see James at the Otaheite meeting last night.

MARGARET. It's so easy to miss people.

ROBERT. Yes. Still, there weren't many there. [*Pause.*] Did you see Constantia after her interview to-day?

MARGARET. No.

ROBERT. Then there has not been a reconciliation?

MARGARET. I have heard of none.

ROBERT. I am glad of that. From what she said this afternoon I was afraid Constantia was inclined to forget the past and return to Richard. It must have been a mere momentary weakness.

MARGARET. You don't think we should desire a reconciliation?

ROBERT. My dear Margaret, how *could* we? With *our* principles! Richard is a libertine. That Constantia should so far forget her duty to morality as to forgive him would be deplorable. Think of the example to other men. If a man who treats his wife as Richard did is not to be punished, there would be an end of married happiness altogether.

MARGARET. They have been parted for a year. Is not that sufficient punishment?

ROBERT [*severely*]. Not in my opinion. However

deep Richard's repentance, it is too soon to forgive him.

MARGARET. James thinks otherwise.

ROBERT [*sternly*]. James is too good-natured. Too good-natured altogether. He is almost lax—yes, lax is the word—he is not severe enough with his brother. Aunt Clara thinks so too. After the separation he should have set his face against all further relations with him.

MARGARET. But they're in business together.

ROBERT. Except business relations, of course. But to ask him down to stay under his roof! It was weak, Margaret—I am not sure it was not wicked. [*Virtuously.*] Certainly, it is not a thing *I* shall ever do.

MARGARET. I suppose not. Indeed, I hardly think Richard would come.

ROBERT. He knows my *principles* too well.

[*Sound of key in front door is heard again. Door slams. Then voices.*

MARGARET. There they are. [*Rises.*

ROBERT [*crossing to table and taking up hat and stick*]. Then I think I'll be going. I do not wish to see more of Richard than I can help. One must not touch pitch!

MARGARET [*going up to door and opening it*]. Is that you, Jim?

JAMES *enters with* DICK—*both have hats and coats.*

JAMES [*entering*]. Yes, dear. [*Kisses her.*] Hullo, Robert, just off?

ROBERT. Yes. It's rather late. Good night. [*Exit.*

DICK. Now I call that very considerate of Robert.

[*Crosses to fireplace, putting coat on table.*

MARGARET [*coming down towards* JAMES]. Enjoyed your billiards, dear?

JAMES. Thanks, yes, very much.

[*Throws his overcoat on to* DICK'S *on table.*

MARGARET. Who was at the Club? Anyone I know?

JAMES [*turning away to sideboard*]. No, I think not. It was rather empty—in fact we saw no one.

MARGARET. How strange ! I wonder why that was ?

JAMES [*diving into sideboard for whisky—slightly confused*]. Of course we were only in the *billiard*-room. There may have been lots of people in the other rooms. Drink, Dick ?

[*Puts spirits on table.*

MARGARET. I see. Are you going to sit up, dear ?

JAMES. For a little while. Why ?

MARGARET. Hadn't you better change your coat ?

JAMES. Oh, bother ! I can't go all the way upstairs.

[*Gives* DICK *his drink.*

MARGARET. Give it me, dear. I'm going now, and I'll bring you down an old jacket.

[*He half protests.*]

Oh yes, I will. It's no trouble.

[*Helps him off with dress coat.*

JAMES. Angel ! [*Kisses her.*

MARGARET. Goose !

[*Exit* MARGARET. JAMES *strolls over to fire.*]

DICK [*by table, watching* JAMES, *taking out cigar and cutting off end*]. You're certainly a fluent liar, Jim.

JAMES. Yes. [*Ruefully.*] I've lots of practice, you see.

DICK. *Your* system, eh ? I prefer mine. It's not such a tax on the inventive faculties.

JAMES [*half bitterly*]. Just you wait till you're as fond of anyone as I am of Margaret, and you'll find yourself lying with the best of them.

DICK. Pessimist !

[MARGARET *enters with old jacket,* JAMES *goes up to meet her, while* DICK *stands by fireplace.*]

MARGARET. Here you are, dear. [*Helps him into it.*] Don't be late.

JAMES [*kisses her*]. Of course not. Good night.

MARGARET. Good night. [*Kisses him.*] Good night, Richard. [*Exit with little nod.*

DICK [*walks down*]. I'm afraid dear Margaret hasn't as warm a regard for me as I deserve.

JAMES [*coming to fireplace*]. I should have thought she managed that!

DICK [*turning*]. Bravo! You're quite epigrammatic to-night. Wonderful what a difference an evening's escape from domesticity makes.

JAMES. Sour grapes, my boy. *You* weren't happy at home, so you want to pretend no one else is.

DICK [*crosses, sits down at table*]. Oh, come, don't pretend you haven't enjoyed yourself to-night. When Kitty Harding was singing "Keep your feet off the grass, dearest," you laughed till I thought you'd have a fit.

JAMES [*giggling at the recollection*]. What a clever little beast she is!

DICK. And that fellow who danced! What was the beggar's name?

JAMES [*pause while thinking*]. I forget. I've got the programme in my coat. [*Goes to overcoat on table and feels in pockets.*] Where the deuce is it? [*An awful pause, during which a look of terror comes into his face.*] Good heavens! I believe it's in the pocket of my dress coat.

[*Searches frantically.*

DICK [*placidly*]. It doesn't matter. We'll look in the morning.

JAMES. But my wife's got it.

[*Throws coat into arm-chair.*

DICK. So she has. But she's not likely to ferret in the pockets, I suppose.

JAMES. Yes, she *will*. She always folds my things if they're lying about, and *takes everything out of the pockets.*

DICK [*jumping up and coming to him*]. What a way to treat a wife! Run upstairs at once. You may get there before she's found it.

JAMES [*pale with terror*]. But what can I *do*? She'd want to know what I came up for.

DICK. Say you've left your handkerchief in the pocket—invent something as you go upstairs. You're a better liar than I am. Off with you!

[*Pushes him across and goes to fireplace.*

JAMES. I *daren't!* Suppose she's found it already!

DICK. My dear chap, she will if you don't go at once. Pull yourself together.

[JAMES *goes to door, opens it and goes out, returning immediately and coming to arm-chair.*]

JAMES [*in a hollow whisper*]. Too late. She's coming downstairs. What on earth's to be done?

DICK. Steady, Jim. She may not have found it.

JAMES. If she has!

DICK [*calmly*]. Then I should make a clean breast of it if I were you.

JAMES. About to-night?

DICK. It would be a trifle late to do that!

JAMES [*ruefully*]. I suppose it would.

DICK. Tell her about everything. Save a lot of trouble in the end. And it'll make things easier for you in the future.

JAMES. I dare say you're right. But I simply haven't the pluck.

DICK. Nonsense. Hush, here she is. Shall I make myself scarce?

JAMES. No. Back me up, for Heaven's sake.

DICK. All right. Courage, old man. [*Leans his back against mantelpiece and surveys scene.*]

[*Door opens, enter* MARGARET—*there is a long silence. She stands near the door.*]

DICK [*aside to* JAMES]. Better say something.

JAMES [*in a quavering voice*]. Do you want anything, dear?

[*She is still silent, looking at him steadily.*]

What is it, Maggie?

MARGARET [*programme in hand—sternly*]. Where were you to-night, James, while Robert and I were out?

JAMES. Why do you ask such a question?

MARGARET. Is it such a strange question for a wife to ask?

JAMES. I went up to London with Dick.

MARGARET. Where?

JAMES. To the Empire.

[*There is an awkward pause.*]

[*Aside to* DICK.] Own up, can't you?

DICK [*in his calm tone*]. It was my suggestion, Margaret. I'm the culprit.

MARGARET [*to* JAMES]. Why did you go?

[*He is silent.*]

DICK. Fact is, I thought he needed livening up. A surfeit of missionary meetings——

MARGARET [*icily*]. I was speaking to my husband. [*Turning again to* JAMES.] Why did you tell me you went to the Club?

JAMES. We *did mean* to go there.

MARGARET. But you didn't go? You've not been there at all?

JAMES. No.

[MARGARET *makes gesture of repulsion and walks down the room.*]

DICK. My dear Margaret, don't fret about *us*! The Empire's a very moral place, far more respectable than most clubs.

MARGARET. I hardly consider *you* a judge of morality, Richard. [*To* JAMES.] Why did you tell me what was not true?

JAMES. I don't know—I suppose because it would have displeased you.

MARGARET [*bitterly*]. You were very considerate!

JAMES [*stung by her tone—coming down towards her*]. Look here, Maggie, there's no use making a fuss about it. It was just a piece of folly, that's all.

MARGARET. Folly! To tell your wife a falsehood!

JAMES [*crossly*]. Oh well, there's nothing so startlingly original about *that.*

MARGARET. I didn't expect to hear a speech of that kind from *you,* James! With *your* high character——

JAMES. Confound my character!

MARGARET [*astonished*]. An evening in Richard's company seems to have produced its effect. Or is that remark the result of your entertainment at a music-hall?

[JAMES *is silent.*]

DICK [*airily*]. Oh, *I'm* the guilty party. The entertainment was irreproachable.

MARGARET. If you would kindly not interrupt, Richard.

[DICK *shrugs his shoulders.*]

Well, James, have you anything to say to me?

JAMES. Only that I'm sorry, Maggie. I am really.

MARGARET. Is *that* all?

JAMES [*goaded*]. What do you want me to say? I can't do more than apologise, can I? The thing's done now. Come, Maggie, shake hands and say you forgive me.

[*Goes towards her holding out hand.*

MARGARET [*refusing his hand*]. No, James, I shall *not* forgive you.

[JAMES *falls back.*]

You have deceived me deliberately.

DICK [*shocked*]. No, no !

MARGARET. Yes, deliberately. You are not what I thought you, and I will *never* forgive you.

[*Turns to go, walking to door.*

JAMES [*alarmed*]. Maggie !

MARGARET [*coldly, turning at door*]. Have you anything more to say ?

DICK [*at* JAMES's *side, quietly*]. Now's your time. Make a clean breast of it. You'll be glad of it afterwards.

JAMES [*pulling himself together—speaking sharply*]. Stop, Margaret !

[*She turns again.*]

I *have* something more to say.

[*She comes towards him again.*]

DICK [*softly—aside*]. Bravo, Jim !

JAMES. Maggie, I've been wanting to tell you this for a long time—— [*Hesitates.*

MARGARET. Go on.

During this scene MARGARET *gets colder and more angry ;* JAMES *gets more self-possessed.*

JAMES. Maggie, I'm—[*hesitates*]—I'm not what you think me—I'm different—very different. [*Stops.*

MARGARET. What do you mean ?

JAMES. You think I'm an awfully good sort of chap, who doesn't care about amusement like other men. You think I'm only happy when I'm attending missionary meetings and reading to Aunt Clara. You're mistaken.

MARGARET [*sternly*]. So you weren't at the Otaheite meeting !

JAMES. No, nor the Tobago Diocesan Conference last week, nor the Hairy Ainos Protection Society, nor the Nova Zembla Mission, nor any of them. I don't like missions, they bore me.

MARGARET [*horrified*]. James !

JAMES. Oh yes, they do. You don't know it, but they do. I've gone on pretending for months that I liked them—and other things—just to please you. I've read Aunt Clara her newspaper and given Robert his subscriptions and generally made my life a burden because you liked it. I've done it long enough. I'm going to turn over a new leaf.

MARGARET [*icily*]. And all the time that you were pretending to go to these meetings you were "amusing" yourself at low music-halls, I suppose.

DICK. Not *low* music-halls.

MARGARET. Bah ! How you have fooled me !

JAMES [*complacently*]. Yes, I'm afraid I've not been quite straightforward. But I'm going to reform from to-night.

MARGARET. How long has this been going on ?

JAMES. I don't know. A year—eighteen months.

MARGARET [*bitterly*]. And we have only been married two years.

JAMES [*almost genially*]. It was partly your fault, you know. You *would* put me on a sort of pedestal. Of course I tumbled off. You ought to have expected it. You see your standard was too high for me. I tried to live up to it at first, honestly, I did, but it wasn't a success ; I wasn't strong enough. But I think *you* ought to share the blame.

MARGARET. Men always throw the blame on women.

JAMES. Only when they deserve it, Maggie. So you see, there's nothing to be angry about. It's just a case of faults on both sides. Shake hands, dear, and give me a kiss. [*Advances towards her.*

MARGARET [*draws back a pace or two and puts her hands behind her back*]. *No*, James, I will *not* shake hands. You have fooled and cheated me. Our whole married life has been a sham.

JAMES. No, no, Maggie.

MARGARET [*fiercely*]. Yes, a cheat and a sham! [*Stamps her foot.*] Oh, how I despise you! How I despise myself for having been deceived by you! Did you ever love me at all, I wonder? [*Half crying—turns away.*

JAMES. You know I did, dear.

MARGARET [*turning, angrily*]. I know nothing. You deceived me in everything else. Why not in that?

JAMES. Never mind, Maggie. Make it up and we'll start afresh to-morrow. Forget about all this; it's past, and I swear I'll always be open with you for the future. I will, really.

MARGARET. The future! [*Coldly.*] You don't suppose I can *live* with you again after this.

[DICK *raises eyebrows.*]

I should despise myself if I even thought of such a thing.

JAMES [*horrified*]. Maggie!

MARGARET. No, James, I shall leave this house to-morrow. I am no longer your wife.

JAMES [*alarmed*]. You can't. You have no right.

MARGARET. Not legally, perhaps. Morally I should do wrong to remain with you.

JAMES. I shall not allow you to go.

MARGARET. How will you prevent me? Constantia left Richard for less.

JAMES [*growing more alarmed*]. Maggie, think! You're angry with me now. It is natural that you should be. But don't punish me too much. Don't leave me. Give me another chance.

MARGARET. And be deceived again? *No, James!* Indeed, I don't think it would be right to forgive you. Men who behave as you have done deserve to suffer.

JAMES [*sadly*]. I didn't expect you would cast me off so readily, Maggie.

MARGARET. You are unjust. You know how I

hate to do it. But I *must*. [*Almost breaking down.*] Oh, Jim, Jim, *why* did you tell me all this? Why didn't you leave me in ignorance?

JAMES [*gently*]. You found me out, dear.

MARGARET. Only about to-night. I could have forgiven you to-night. It's all these months of deception that I *can't* forget.

JAMES. You will.

MARGARET [*bursting into tears*]. No. If it was only to-night it would be different, but now that I know your whole life has been a lie, I cannot live with you any longer. [*With a gulp.*] Good-bye, James. [*Solemnly she walks up towards the door.*]

JAMES [*startled*]. Where are you going?

MARGARET [*through her tears*]. To b-b-bed. I shall leave this house to-morrow after breakfast.

[*Exit in a burst of emotion.*

[*There is a pause, during which* DICK *looks half-humorously at* JAMES, *who goes half-way up to door as if to follow, and then turns away. He looks unutterably depressed.*]

DICK. Curious how much alike sisters are.

JAMES [*brusquely*]. What do you mean?

DICK. I remember an almost similar scene a year ago with Constantia. The marriage tie seems to sit loosely on our family.

JAMES [*snappishly*]. I shall be glad if you won't jest about it.

DICK [*seriously*]. Steady, old man. Don't quarrel with your brother as well as your wife in one evening.

JAMES [*becoming penitent*]. I beg your pardon. I'm knocked out of time by all this. [*Angrily.*] But I won't have you sneering at Margaret. She's a saint.

DICK. My dear Jim, to say that a lady resembles one's wife isn't usually described as sneering.

JAMES [*impatiently*]. Oh, you know what I mean.

DICK [*putting his hand on* JAMES'S *shoulder*]. Poor old boy, you *do* take it bad !

[JAMES *puts his head on his hands and his shoulders heave with sobs.*]

I say, don't do that, for Heaven's sake ! Easy, Jim, easy. She won't go, you know.

JAMES [*turning away*]. She will, I'm sure she will. You don't know Margaret.

DICK. And if she does, there are worse things than being a bachelor again !

JAMES [*laughing in spite of himself*]. That's right—make a joke about it.

DICK. My remark was perfectly serious.

[*Goes to table.*

JAMES [*turning again and coming towards table*]. And the deuce of it all is if I hadn't taken *your* advice and blurted out the whole story like a fool, she would have forgiven me.

DICK [*grimly*]. So she *said.*

[*Pours himself out another drink.*

JAMES. And she would too. [*Crossly.*] I'll trouble you not to question it.

[DICK *shrugs his shoulders.*]

This comes of your cursed policy of candour. After this I'll never speak the truth again as long as I live. Never !

[*Soda fizzes loudly into whisky as the Curtain falls.*]

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*The drawing-room at the* JAMES WETHERBYS'. *The French windows on to garden are open. The sun shines brilliantly.*

Enter JAMES *and* DICK, *the former looking wretchedly depressed. He goes to fire shivering, and warms hands.*

DICK [*strolling up to open window and looking out*]. Jove, what a glorious morning!

JAMES. Is it? I hadn't noticed.

DICK. You didn't eat any breakfast. How the deuce is a fellow to notice anything on an empty stomach?

JAMES. I wasn't hungry.

DICK. Ah! *I* was. [*Turning to him and noticing his depression. Then going to him more sympathetically.*] Fretting, Jim?

JAMES. I suppose so.

DICK [*affectionately*]. What a soft-hearted beggar it is. Cheer up.

JAMES (*savagely*). One would think being about to be separated from one's wife was an everyday occurrence to hear you talk.

DICK [*humouring him*]. No, no, not quite that. But will she go? That's the question.

JAMES. You heard what she said last night.

DICK [*easily*]. Oh, I don't attach much importance to *that*!

JAMES [*bitterly*]. I'm afraid I can't share your confidence.

DICK. Not seen her to-day?

JAMES. No. She wasn't at breakfast, as you saw.

DICK [*horrified*]. Has *she* had no breakfast either?

JAMES. I don't know.

DICK [*holding up his hands*]. What a household! Aunt Clara, too? *She* wasn't down. I assume she also is fasting?

JAMES. She always has breakfast in her room.

DICK [*cheerfully*]. I congratulate you. *Robert* I suppose you're never safe from?

SERVANT [*announcing*]. Mr. Robert Carne!

DICK [*sitting in arm-chair—sardonically*]. Ah, I thought so!

Enter ROBERT.

JAMES [*sulkily*]. Good morning.

ROBERT. Good morning, James. I thought I should find Margaret here.

JAMES. She's not come down yet.

ROBERT. Ah! I'll wait. [*Sits on ottoman.*

JAMES. She won't be down for some time. Perhaps you'd better come in later.

ROBERT. I've nothing special to do.

[JAMES *makes gesture of despair* at ROBERT'S *obtuseness behind* ROBERT'S *back. There is a pause. Then he turns back to* ROBERT *and speaks, hesitating between each lie and obviously taxing his powers of invention.*]

JAMES. She may not be here for an hour. She has a headache. I advise you to go out for a stroll. She may be a long time yet.

ROBERT. Well, perhaps, I'd better come back.

[*Exit.*

[JAMES *gives a sigh of relief.*]

DICK [*looking at* JAMES *curiously*]. My dear Jim, do you *never* speak the truth?

JAMES. Eh? No. [*Bitterly.*] I suppose I've got out of the habit. [*Sits down.*

DICK [*rises and comes to him*]. Why didn't you kick the beggar out instead of inventing all that rot about Margaret?

JAMES. I ought to have done so, I suppose. It would have been more straightforward. But I'm hopelessly demoralised. I can't bear hurting the feelings of anyone, even an ass like Robert.

DICK. What a good chap you are!

JAMES [*with a bitter laugh*]. Good!

Enter MARGARET. *She looks pale as if after a sleepless night, but there is no sign of softening in her face.*

[*Rising and going towards her with outstretched hands.*] Good morning, Maggie.

MARGARET. Is that you, James? I thought you would have gone up to business by now. [*Ignores hand.*

JAMES [*drops hand to his side and turns away*]. I'm not going. I telegraphed up this morning. They'll let me know if there's anything important.

MARGARET. I came to collect a few things out of this room, which I should like to take with me.

JAMES [*hopelessly*]. You are still resolved to go?

MARGARET. Quite, James.

JAMES. Where?

MARGARET. To Constantia in the first instance. I dare say she can find room for me for a time. Afterwards, some arrangement will have to be made between us, I suppose. But the lawyers can see to all that. They did in Constantia's case, did they not?

[*She looks towards* DICK *as she says this, but does not address him directly.*]

DICK [*cheerily*]. Oh yes. *They'll* manage it all right. In an amicable separation of this kind, they're invaluable. You leave it to *them.* [*At back.*

JAMES [*goes towards* MARGARET, *standing a little away from her—in a low voice*]. Is it quite useless to urge you to pause before you do this, Maggie?

MARGARET. Quite useless, James. My mind is made up. [*Moves away.*] Constantia will be here in a few minutes. I have written to her. Perhaps it would be better if you were not here when she arrived—either of you—it would be painful to everybody.

[*Including* DICK *in her look, but still not addressing him.*]

DICK. Quite right. Let's go out into the garden, Jim, and give Constantia a fair field.

[*Goes towards window, where he stands looking grimly towards the others.*]

JAMES. I shall see you before you go?

MARGARET. If you wish it.

JAMES [*breaking out—crossing to her*]. Maggie, if you only knew how sorry I am! How ashamed!

MARGARET [*raising her hand*]. Please! If you wish to see me to say good-bye, I am willing, but don't try to change my resolution. You will not succeed.

Exeunt JAMES *and* DICK.

[MARGARET, *left alone, takes small tray from piano, and wanders round room collecting various trifles, a small clock in case, a couple of books, and a silver scent bottle. She pauses by photograph of* JAMES *on mantelpiece, takes it up, looks at it for some time, half puts it down again, then seems to make up her mind, and takes it, adding it to pile on small table.*]

SERVANT [*announcing*]. Mrs. Richard Wetherby.

Enter CONSTANTIA. *Exit* MAID.

CONSTANTIA [*fussily—going over to her*]. My *dear* Margaret, what has happened? I came *at once.* Are you in trouble of any kind? Your note explained nothing.

MARGARET. I thought I would rather tell you myself. I have discovered that James has been deceiving me, and I am leaving him. Can you take me in for a few days?

CONSTANTIA [*astonished*]. Of course, dear, with pleasure

—that is, I mean, are you really obliged to take this step?

MARGARET. I *am* obliged to do so. No other course is open to me.

CONSTANTIA. But, my dear, this is very sudden. James, too! So high principled as he always appeared! Are you sure there has been no mistake?

MARGARET. He has admitted everything.

CONSTANTIA. How extraordinary! I never should have thought that of James! But there—you never know *men*! [*Sits down.*] When do you think of coming to me?

MARGARET. To-day, if you can have me. I am merely putting a few things together to take with me.

[*Adding something to the pile on small table.*

CONSTANTIA. Quite right, dear. You can't be too careful about *that*. I left such a *lot* of things behind me, when I left Richard, that I wanted afterwards! Plate, for instance, and knives! I took not a single spoon or fork, and the same with table linen.

MARGARET [*crosses and sits down*]. I was not thinking of those things. I shall only take a few personal belongings, nothing of value.

CONSTANTIA. Is that *wise*, dear? Of course James must make you a suitable allowance. My own from Richard was *most* meagre! And even a small establishment costs so much to start. The merest necessaries are so expensive. And they wear out in no time nowadays.

MARGARET [*listlessly*]. I dare say.

CONSTANTIA. But tell me, dear, when did you find out this about James?

MARGARET. Last night. It seems that for months he and Richard have been spending most of their evenings in low dissipation.

CONSTANTIA. Richard was the tempter, of course?

MARGARET [*listlessly*]. I suppose so.

CONSTANTIA [*rising energetically*]. Margaret, there must be an end of this. Richard must not be allowed to exercise

his malign influence unfettered. My mind is made up. I shall put a stop to it !

MARGARET. How will you do that ?

CONSTANTIA [*very decidedly*]. By returning to his roof ! As long as he is living as a bachelor there is no check on his depravities. But when *I* am with him I can at least see that he keeps within bounds.

MARGARET. You will go back to him ? You will forgive him ?

CONSTANTIA. No. I shall not forgive him. He has not deserved that. But I shall go back to him. I cannot allow him to retain his liberty any longer. When I separated from him it was to punish his misconduct and give him an opportunity for repentance, not to enable him to plunge deeper into vice and folly. [*Crosses to fire.*

MARGARET. But, Constantia ! *Ought* you to do this ? Won't you be very unhappy ? [*Rises.*

CONSTANTIA [*calmly*]. I shall be able to bear it. Indeed, I have not found my life apart from Richard so happy either. The house is very small and the dining-room chimney smokes. [*Sits at desk.*] Of course these things do not *weigh* with me, but they exist. And you must remember that it was *duty* which made me leave my husband, not pleasure. The lot of a woman living apart from her husband has great inconveniences. It may be right that she should do it, it may be *right* that *you* should, dear, but it is not *pleasant* !

MARGARET [*sits on ottoman—bitterly*]. The life of a woman who lives with a husband she no longer loves is not pleasant either.

CONSTANTIA. No doubt. [*In a practical tone.*] Still, of the two, I think I prefer it. [*Pause.*] And in any case we can only take the course which we believe to be *right*. *My* duty is clearly to return to Richard and to watch over him more carefully in future.

MARGARET. Then you will not be able to take me in for a few days?

CONSTANTIA. No, dear. I shall be going back to town with Richard this afternoon. But you can have my house for the present with pleasure. Houses are always better occupied, aren't they? And I shall probably not be able to let it immediately.

MARGARET. You intend to speak to Richard to-day?

CONSTANTIA [*briskly*]. Yes. At once, if you will kindly send for him.

MARGARET [*rises*]. Very well. [*Rings bell.*] And now if you don't mind I'll go upstairs and finish my packing.

Enter MAID.

Will you ask Mr. Richard to come here, Jane? He is in the garden. Take these things upstairs when you have done so. [*Points to things on sofa and exit.*

[*Exit* MAID, *returning a moment later with* DICK. *Then exit* MAID *with tray full of things.*]

DICK. Hullo, Constantia! You here? You want to see me?

CONSTANTIA. Yes, Richard.

DICK. But this isn't in the agreement. The agreement said that we were to meet once a year. I really can't talk to you two days running!

CONSTANTIA. This is not a time for jesting.

DICK. It never is—with you, Constantia!

[*She makes impatient gesture.*]

Well, what do you want to say to me?

CONSTANTIA. Richard, I have heard of your shocking behaviour.

DICK. Not for the first time, I am sure.

CONSTANTIA. It appears, from what Margaret has told me, that you now abuse your liberty as shamelessly as you

formerly abused your position as a husband. In the one case you made *my* life wretched. In the other you lead others into temptation.

DICK. Meaning poor old Jim.

CONSTANTIA. I mean your unhappy brother James.

DICK [*nodding*]. I suppose it's the same person.

CONSTANTIA. What I have now to say to you is, that I cannot permit you to be a source of moral contamination to others any longer.

DICK. I see. You're going to keep your eye on me from Norwood? Very sporting of you to warn me beforehand.

CONSTANTIA. No, Richard. I am going to return to you as your wife! [*Rises.*

DICK [*his jaw drops*]. Oh no, you're not!

[*Moves away.*

CONSTANTIA. I beg your pardon.

DICK. My dear Constantia, pray dismiss this idea from your mind altogether. You will not return to me because I decline to receive you.

CONSTANTIA [*astonished*]. You refuse?

DICK. Of course I refuse. You don't love me. You told me that yesterday. And now your only idea in returning to me is to keep an eye on my moral character. You don't suppose I shall *like* that, do you?

CONSTANTIA [*frigidly*]. It was not intended that you should.

DICK. Precisely. So I decline to submit myself to the experiment.

CONSTANTIA. I shall insist upon it. [*Loftily.*] It is the *duty* of a husband and wife to live together.

DICK. It's taken you some time to find out that!

[*Moves away slightly.*

CONSTANTIA [*takes a step after him—after a pause*]. Tell me, Richard, what is your reason for this refusal? You must have a reason.

DICK. My dear Constantia, it's simple enough, I no longer love you.

CONSTANTIA [*starting back*]. You dare tell me that!

DICK. Why not? You no longer love *me*. You told me so yesterday.

CONSTANTIA [*walks away*]. There's some other reason. I'm sure of it. If you no longer care for me it must be because you have met some one else.

DICK [*sits*]. My dear, don't be childish.

CONSTANTIA [*turning*]. Oh, you can't put me off in that way. A man doesn't want to live apart from his wife in this discreditable manner unless there is some other woman he loves better.

DICK. What shocking ideas you moral people have.

CONSTANTIA [*coming and standing over him*]. If you were not irreclaimably vicious you would welcome this chance of a reconciliation.

DICK. Vicious? Nonsense, I'm not vicious. I'm a very moral person.

CONSTANTIA. Then you deceived me grossly. You always *told* me you were vicious.

DICK. I think not.

CONSTANTIA. Well, when I said so, you never denied it.

DICK. I always used to let you have your own way. That's why you left me. Women like to be tyrannised over.

CONSTANTIA [*she takes a few paces and turns—controlling herself with difficulty*]. Will you answer me one question?

DICK [*blandly*]. No. I don't think I will. In fact this whole interview is most irregular. You must keep it for next year.

CONSTANTIA. You're unbearable.

DICK [*rises, triumphantly*]. That's why we're so much better apart. I'm sure you feel that?

CONSTANTIA [*coming up to him, fiercely*]. You won't get rid of me so easily.

DICK [*sweetly*]. Not altogether, perhaps. But the relative freedom I at present enjoy suits me well enough.

CONSTANTIA [*furious*]. I'll find a way of punishing you for this!

DICK [*laughing*]. Threats! My dear Con, you shock me. Why should you object? You'll be happy enough. You'll have Margaret with you, you know.

[CONSTANTIA *makes a gesture of rage. She walks away from him.*]

As for Jim, he will share my flat in Maddox Street. It's big enough for two.

[JAMES *passes French window.* DICK *calls to him.*]

Won't you, Jim?

JAMES [*coming to window*]. What did you say?

DICK. I was telling Constantia you and I were going to settle down together in Maddox Street.

CONSTANTIA [*crosses to* DICK *with gesture of fury*]. Brute! [*Exit, in a towering passion.*

DICK. Come in, Jim. I never could resist the temptation to chaff Constantia.

JAMES [*coming down, sarcastically*]. I suppose she *liked* that?

DICK. If she did, she concealed the feeling very successfully. But how about you, old man? *You* don't look very bright. Wife not forgiven you yet?

JAMES. No. She's determined to leave me.

DICK. Lucky fellow! *My* wife wants to *return* to *me*! I'm far more to be pitied.

JAMES [*irritably*]. I wish to Heaven you'd be serious sometimes.

DICK. Serious? I'm deuced serious. Why, I tell you, my dear chap, if I hadn't been absolutely rude to Constantia, she'd have thrown herself into my arms and

we should have had to begin married life all over again! I shouldn't have liked *that* at all.

JAMES. Why did she want to go back? It seems an odd taste.

DICK. Taste had nothing to do with it. It was pure conscientiousness on her part. She thinks she ought to look after me.

JAMES. And you refused to take her back?

DICK [*nods*]. Certainly.

JAMES [*disgusted*]. You must be an absolute brute. [*Sits.*

DICK. Why? She left me of her own choice. I'm not going to be sent about my business and then whistled back again at a moment's notice. What would you say—[*crosses to him*]—if Margaret told you she'd altered her mind and wasn't going to leave you after all?

JAMES [*enthusiastically*]. Say? Why, that she was the dearest, kindest, most forgiving little soul in the world.

DICK [*horrified*]. My dear fellow!

JAMES. Confound you, Dick, can't you understand that I *love* Margaret—that there's nothing on earth I wish so much as to be reconciled to her?

DICK. And go back to the old slavery?

JAMES. It wasn't slavery. It was happiness.

[DICK *gasps.*]

DICK. Well, you certainly have the most curious conception of happiness. But there, go back to your Margaret, if you must!

JAMES. If I only could!

DICK. But don't expect me to take back Constantia, because I sha'n't.

JAMES. I don't believe you're serious.

DICK. I'm perfectly serious. [*Looking at him keenly.*] Are you?

JAMES. About Margaret? Of course.

[DICK *shrugs his shoulders.*]

Dash it, man, one would think it was *unusual* for a husband to want to be reconciled to his wife !

DICK. 'Tisn't what you'd call *common* ! But there, it's your taste. Send her down to me. Say I've something to say to her.

[JAMES *rises.*]

I dare say I can bring her to reason.

[*In an offhand way.*

JAMES. She won't come.

DICK. Oh yes, she will—from curiosity.

[*Exit* JAMES *disgusted at this parting piece of cynicism.*]

[*While he is away* DICK *strolls about room, examining philistine decorations with every sign of contempt. Notices gap on mantelpiece where* JIM'S *picture used to be. Whistles. Enter* MARGARET. *He turns hurriedly and stands with back to fireplace.*]

MARGARET. You wish to speak to me ?

DICK. Yes. Sit down.

MARGARET [*sits on ottoman*]. I should tell you at once that if your intention is to plead on James's behalf, you are only wasting your time.

DICK [*airily*]. Oh, it isn't. I think Jim's rather well out of it.

MARGARET [*with frozen dignity*]. I beg your pardon ?

DICK. It isn't half bad being a bachelor again, at least that's my experience.

MARGARET. James is not of your opinion.

DICK. He will be. Not at first, of course, but afterwards, and anyhow he'll get accustomed to it. It's astonishing how quickly men get *used* to things. He'll drop back into the old bachelor ways. No Aunt Clara ! [*Impressively.*] No Robert ! Oh, *he'll* be happy enough. You needn't fret about *him* !

MARGARET. It's not true. James is not like that.

DICK. My dear Margaret, men are very much alike. He'll get to enjoy his freedom as I have done.

MARGARET [*fiercely*]. He won't ! He won't ! You're heartless and selfish. You don't *feel* at all. Jim loves me.

DICK [*pause—quietly*]. I used to love Constantia.

MARGARET. Used to love ?

DICK. Yes. [*With obvious sincerity.*] People say that love never dies. On the contrary love is killed, oh so easily. A word, a look, moments of temper, inopportune tears. How they kill love !

MARGARET. I don't believe you.

DICK. Oh yes, you do. And besides these, there are other things—boredom, relations—you're not very fortunate in the matter of relations, are you ? Little failures of tact and taste, little errors of judgment, all these contain a drop of the poison which may help to kill love !

MARGARET [*wondering*]. Why do you speak to me like this ? You are quite serious. I thought you were never serious.

DICK. I'm not often—fortunately.

MARGARET [*puzzled*]. But why now ? [*Rising angrily.*] I see what it is. This is a trap. You want to make me forgive James.

DICK [*in his most exasperating manner*]. My dear Margaret, be sensible. Sit down. Why on earth should *I* want you to forgive Jim. I *like* him !

MARGARET [*stung*]. What do you mean ?

DICK. You see, if you leave Jim *I* shall see a lot more of him than I do now. As far as I am concerned the more completely you sever your connection with him the better.

MARGARET [*triumphantly*]. But he wouldn't be happy.

DICK. Ah ! we don't agree about that.

MARGARET [*sitting down*]. Then why did you send for me ? Why have you spoken to me at all ? If you would rather I left James why need you do anything but just leave us to part as we *were* doing ?

DICK. *Were?* Your resolution is wavering, you see.
[*Moves slightly towards her.*

MARGARET [*hotly*]. It is *not*!

DICK [*calmly*]. I misunderstand you, then. So much the better for me. *I* get Jim. You don't!

MARGARET [*bewildered*]. I don't understand. You haven't told me yet why you're trying to bring us together—if you are trying.

DICK [*dispassionately*]. It's a sort of random benevolence on my part. I have fits of it.

MARGARET [*peevishly*]. What *do* you mean?

DICK. The fact is, I was talking to poor old Jim a few minutes ago, and he really did seem most awfully fond of you and all that, in spite of the way you've behaved——

MARGARET [*rising angrily*]. *I've* behaved! Thank you, Richard. That will do. I told you it was useless for you to plead on James's behalf. I am now sure of it.
[*Walks away.*

DICK [*laughing*]. Come back, Margaret. You misunderstand me. If you would kindly have let me finish my sentence.

MARGARET. Well?
[*Turns to face him but does not come back.*

DICK. Let me see, where was I? Oh, I found that Jim was awfully fond of you—absurdly so it seemed to me—and you're awfully fond of him too, you know, though you won't admit it at present.

MARGARET. I don't see that that is any reason why you should have interfered.

DICK [*impatiently*]. My dear Margaret, when I see a woman deliberately throwing away her own happiness, I think it's only kind to warn her. That's all.

MARGARET. *Her* happiness?

DICK. Yes. [*Pause.*] Jim will get over this all right, as I said. Men do. They're tough. And they've lots of distractions. It's different with women. [*Coldly.*]

So I thought I'd just give you a hint before it was too late.

MARGARET [*sarcastically*]. Isn't it rather late for *you* to begin to consider *me*?

DICK. I dare say. But it's not too late for you to consider yourself.

MARGARET [*haughtily*]. I haven't the least idea what you mean by that.

DICK. Sit down and I'll try to make myself clear.

[*She sits. He sits beside her on the ottoman.* MARGARET *on the right.* DICK *on the left.*]

MARGARET. Well?

DICK. Do you know what passed between myself and Constantia this morning?

MARGARET. Yes. A reconciliation.

DICK. No. Your sister wished for one. At least she wished to patch up our marriage somehow. I refused.

MARGARET. You refused?

DICK. Yes. [*Pause.*] I'm happier as I am.

MARGARET. And Constantia? Didn't you think at all of her?

DICK. Constantia made her choice a year ago. She can't alter it now.

MARGARET. And are you never going to live with her again? Never at all?

DICK [*cheerfully*]. *Never!* On that point I am quite clear. [*There is a pause.*

MARGARET [*slowly*]. I still don't see what all this has to do with *me*.

DICK [*airily*]. Merely a parallel case. That's all.

MARGARET [*in a whisper*]. Parallel?

DICK [*sternly*]. Yes. I loved Constantia once. Jim loves you now. Constantia sulked with me, badgered me, bored me, finally left me as you are leaving Jim. Poor woman, she thought she would be happy living alone. At least she thought she would be contented. So do you. She

was mistaken. You can see it in her face, the lonely look of the woman who has no home. And we have only been separated a year! Yet she so hates her present life that this morning nothing but my direct refusal to receive her prevented her from returning to me. What a situation! How humiliating and disastrous! Think carefully, Margaret, before you do as she did.

MARGARET [*half to herself*]. What an escape! What an escape!

DICK. You *will* think carefully? Not for Jim's sake, Margaret, *but for your own.*

[MARGARET *bursts into tears.*]

[*Rises.*] There, there, that's all right, dry your eyes and then go and make it up with Jim.

MARGARET [*trying to stifle her sobs*]. B—b—but will he forgive me? Will he make it up?

DICK [*grimly*]. Oh yes, he'll forgive you all right.

MARGARET [*rising and drying her eyes*]. It's very unjust. Men always have the best of it. *They* do wrong and *we* suffer.

DICK. Ah well, you manage to make it pretty disagreeable for them too sometimes.

MARGARET [*half crying*]. I thought I was doing right. Jim behaved very badly. It was my *duty* to punish him.

DICK. You don't call punishing your husband *duty*? *I* call it pleasure.

MARGARET [*laughing through her tears*]. You're very horrid! But you meant this kindly. You're not really *bad*, Dick. I see that now.

DICK [*alarmed*]. For Heaven's sake don't begin putting *me* on a pedestal! It wouldn't suit me at all. [*Going to door, opens it and calls.*] Jim! Jim! [*To* MARGARET.] Come, summon up a smile to greet your husband. Ever such a little one!

[*She smiles faintly. She crosses, and turns towards him.*]

Enter JAMES.

Jim, go to your wife and tell her you're heartily ashamed of yourself and will never do anything wrong again, and perhaps she'll forgive you. I'll go upstairs and finish packing. I shan't be two minutes. [*Exit hastily.*

JAMES [*coming towards her*]. Margaret! Is it true? Will you forgive me this time?

MARGARET. Yes, Jim, if you'll promise never to hide anything from me again. [*Embraces him.*

JAMES. Angel! Of course I promise. I'll never hide anything from you in future. And I'll never go anywhere with Dick again as long as I live!

MARGARET. Oh no, Jim, you mustn't say that. I've changed my opinion about Dick. I believe he's quite good really, nearly as good as you are, only not so serious. I should like him to come and stay with us. He's fond of you, Jim.

JAMES. What will Aunt Clara say to that?

MARGARET. Aunt Clara will not be here. She must go away; and Robert too. In future we must have our house to ourselves, and live our lives in our own way.

JAMES [*embracing*]. Margaret, you're a trump! But I'll deserve it. I swear I will. I'll do whatever you wish. [*Draws her down on sofa beside him.*

MARGARET. Dear old Jim. [*Strokes his hair affectionately.*

Enter DICK *with bag and overcoat.*

DICK. Hullo, not finished yet?

[MARGARET *moves away from him hastily.*]

JAMES. Confound you, Dick, don't interrupt. [*Possesses himself of* MARGARET'S *hand.*

DICK. Not for worlds. But as my train goes in ten minutes, I thought you might find time to say good-bye to me. [*Comes towards them.*]

JAMES [*rising*]. You're not going before lunch?

MARGARET. Do stay.

DICK. No. [*Getting into coat.*] The atmosphere of this place is altogether too connubial. I must get back to my lonely flat in Maddox Street, where no wives are admitted. Good-bye, Maggie. Good-bye, Jim. Don't be too *good*, either of you! And when you see Constantia, tell her I've [JAMES *and* MARGARET *cross together*] decided to remain a grass widower permanently.

[*Turns to go, picking up bag and hat.* MARGARET *and* JAMES *stand hand in hand. As he reaches the door, enter* CONSTANTIA *dressed as for a journey. In her hand she carries a dressing-bag.*]

Hullo, Con, I was just speaking of you. What *is* the use of that confounded agreement if you keep popping up in this way? What are *you* doing here?

CONSTANTIA. I came to find *you*, Richard.

DICK. But this is quite out of order. You were to see me once a year, not twice a day. Besides, I'm just off to London.

CONSTANTIA. I also am going to London.

DICK. By this train?

CONSTANTIA. Yes.

DICK [*crosses*]. Very well. You've just time to catch it. [*Sits down.*] I'll take the next.

CONSTANTIA. No, Richard, we shall go together.

[*Comes towards him.*

DICK. What!

CONSTANTIA. I have made up my mind to forgive you. I consider it my duty.

DICK [*with the calmness of despair*]. There seems to be a perfect epidemic of forgiveness down here just now.

Here's Margaret who has made it up with Jim, and there they stand holding one another's hands in a manner that's perfectly sickening.

[MARGARET *pulls her hand away guiltily.*]

And now *you* want to forgive *me*! I don't want to be forgiven! I *won't* be forgiven!

CONSTANTIA [*sternly*]. Margaret! Is this true?

MARGARET. Yes, Connie.

CONSTANTIA. Indeed! Well, I only hope you will not live to regret it. You appear to me to have acted with undue precipitation!

JAMES. We're going to risk it!

CONSTANTIA [*with grunt of disapproval, turning to* DICK]. Well, Richard. I am ready.

DICK. I'm not. I decline to allow you to come with me.

CONSTANTIA [*firmly*]. Nothing but physical violence will prevent me.

DICK [*rises, reproachfully*]. Look here, Con, is this fair? I allowed you to leave me when you wanted to. *You've* no right to change your mind now. It's fickle, that's what I call it. Beastly fickle!

CONSTANTIA. This is not a moment for jesting.

DICK [*disgusted*]. It certainly isn't!

CONSTANTIA [*sternly*]. Then if you will take up your bag, perhaps we had better start.

DICK. I'm dashed if I will. I can't take you to Maddox Street. You'd be awfully uncomfortable there.

CONSTANTIA. I shall do very well. You said there was room for two only this morning.

[DICK *makes a gesture of despair.*]

MARGARET [*coaxingly*]. Dick, be *nice* to her. You're not hard-hearted really, though you like to pretend to be. Take her back.

DICK. Look here, Maggie, I call that pretty rough. Is this my reward for reconciling you to your husband?

MARGARET. Well, I'm only trying to reconcile you to your wife.

DICK [*disgusted*]. Dash it all! Don't joke about it. *One* humorist is enough in any family.

JAMES. Make it up, old man. It isn't half bad being married after all, eh, Maggie? And you can't prevent her from coming unless you call in the police! You only separated by mutual consent.

DICK [*resigning himself*]. Very well. Look here, Con, if you'll say you're sorry for the way you've treated me, and will let me do everything that I please in future and always laugh at my jokes, I'll forgive you. I can't say fairer than that.

MARGARET. Say yes, Connie.

DICK [*to her more kindly*]. Come, Con, do the thing handsomely. Is it yes?

CONSTANTIA. Yes, Richard.

[*They shake hands.*]

CURTAIN

[*At second curtain* CONSTANTIA *is by door, followed by* DICK *carrying BOTH the bags.*]

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

A COMEDY FOR FATHERS

(1904)

" Character is Fate "

CHARACTERS

Samuel Jackson.

Mrs. Jackson, *his wife.*

Henry Jackson, *their elder son.*

Eustace Jackson, *their younger son.*

Violet Jackson, *their daughter.*

Sir John Faringford, Bart.

Lady Faringford, *his wife.*

Stella Faringford, *their daughter.*

Dr. Glaisher.

The Rev. Cyril Pratt, *the Rector.*

Mrs. Pratt, *his wife.*

Baines, *Butler at the Jacksons'.*

Two Footmen.

The action of the play takes place at Chedleigh Court, the Jacksons' house in Gloucestershire, Act I in the Drawing-room, Act II in the Breakfast-room, Act III on the Lawn, and Act IV in the Drawing-room again. Chedleigh, as everybody knows, is famous for its cloth mills.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

ACT I

SCENE.—*The* JACKSONS' *drawing-room, a handsome room suggesting opulence rather than taste. Not vulgar but not distinguished. Too full of furniture, pictures, knick-knacks, chair covers, plants in pots. Too full of everything. The door is on the right. On the grand piano, which is on the opposite side of the room from the door, are large bowls of flowers, photograph frames, and other inappropriate things. There are also plants in the fireplace, as it is summer and that is the* JACKSONS' *conception of the proper way to adorn a fireplace and a suitable place for growing plants. Easy chairs everywhere. The room is lighted by electricity, but when the curtain rises only a few of the lights are turned on. The time is after dinner on a summer evening.*

When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then the door opens and LADY FARINGFORD *enters, followed by her daughter* STELLA, MRS. PRATT, VIOLET JACKSON, *and, after an interval,* MRS. JACKSON.

MRS. JACKSON [*heard calling to her husband before she enters*]. You won't stay too long over your cigars, will you, Samuel? [*She comes in.*] I always notice the gentlemen stay far too long in the dining-room unless they're specially told not to. Now, Lady Faringford, where will you sit? Try this sofa.

LADY FARINGFORD [*selecting the most comfortable corner of the sofa*]. Thank you.

MRS. JACKSON. That's right. Mrs. Pratt, where shall I put you? No, don't go there. That's such a long way off. Come here. [*Drags up arm-chair near* LADY FARINGFORD *with hospitable inelegance.* MRS. PRATT *sits.*] Are you all right, Stella?

STELLA [*who has already found a seat*]. Quite, thanks, Mrs. Jackson.

VIOLET. Where will you go, mother?

MRS. JACKSON. I'm going to sit here. Wait till I turn on some more light. [*Goes to door and does so.*] That's better!

[MRS. JACKSON *takes seat by* LADY FARINGFORD. VIOLET *sits by* STELLA *and, after a decent interval, draws work-basket towards her and quietly begins to knit.*]

LADY FARINGFORD. I do envy you your electric light, Mrs. Jackson. Lamps are so troublesome. The servants are always setting themselves on fire with them.

MRS. JACKSON [*comfortably*]. It *is* convenient, isn't it?

LADY FARINGFORD. How long have you had it?

MRS. JACKSON. Only about eighteen months. We had it brought here at the same time that they were putting it in at the Mill. It seemed a pity not to as it was so close. And now I don't know what we should do without it.

MRS. PRATT. I saw it was all on at the Mill as we passed to-night.

MRS. JACKSON. Yes. They can work much later now it's been put in. That was Henry's idea. It was almost impossible to work overtime profitably before on account of the light. Now the Mill often works night and day when there's a pressure.

STELLA. Surely the workmen must sleep sometimes?

MRS. JACKSON [*placidly*]. They have different sets of

workmen, I believe. But you must ask Henry. He knows all about it.

LADY FARINGFORD. Mr. Jackson seems pretty cheerful about his election prospects.

MRS. JACKSON. Yes. I do hope he'll get in. It will be such an amusement for him.

MRS. PRATT. It would certainly be most regrettable if Mr. Ling were elected. He is a dissenter. The Rector says a clergyman should have no politics, but I say a clergyman with no politics is never made a bishop.

LADY FARINGFORD. I trust the Rector will not allow Mr. Ling to use the Parish Room for any of his meetings.

MRS. PRATT. I'm afraid he will. He says he can't make distinctions between the two parties. If he lends the room to one he must lend it to the other.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then he had better lend it to neither. That will answer the purpose quite well. For Mr. Jackson can easily hire some place for his meetings while Mr. Ling cannot. It is such a comfort that all the rich people about here are Conservatives. But I believe the same thing may be noticed in other parts of the country. It almost seems like a special Providence.

MRS. JACKSON. I hope Sir John thinks my husband will get in?

LADY FARINGFORD. Oh yes, I think so. It's unfortunate that Mr. Ling is so popular. Only with quite vulgar people no doubt, Nonconformists and so forth. But even then they have votes unfortunately. Still Mr. Jackson employs a large number of people and they will vote for him, of course—or what's the use of being an employer?—and if he is sufficiently liberal with his subscriptions——

MRS. JACKSON. I believe my husband subscribes to *everything*.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then I'm sure he'll get in. It's a pity he won't have the Illingtons' support, by the way.

They have a great deal of influence in their part of the county.

MRS. PRATT [*horrified*]. Surely Sir James hasn't turned Radical?

LADY FARINGFORD. No, no. Not so bad as *that*! But I hear he's quite ruined. His racing stable has cost him a fortune in the last few years and he's never won a single race. Braden will be to let in the autumn.

MRS. JACKSON. Poor Sir James. He will feel parting with the place dreadfully.

LADY FARINGFORD. It's his own fault. He ought never to have made that absurd marriage. Mary Illington —she was Mary Tremayne, you know, one of the Wiltshire Tremaynes—hadn't a sixpence. What will become of that boy of theirs at Eton I can't think. They'll never be able to pay his school bills.

MRS. JACKSON. Public schools *are* dreadfully expensive, aren't they? I remember when Eustace, my second boy, was at Harrow—Henry was never at a Public School—his bills were terribly high.

MRS. PRATT. I wonder whom we shall have at Braden. I do hope they will be Church people. The Scalebys, who took Astley Park, play tennis on Sundays and seem to me to be little better than heathens. It sets such a bad example.

LADY FARINGFORD. The county is changing sadly. Half the old houses have changed hands, and the new people are usually quite dreadful. If this sort of thing goes on there won't be a single person fit to speak to within twenty miles.

[*Silence falls upon the company as* LADY FARINGFORD *makes this tactful remark, but that lady seems quite unconscious of the effect she has produced. Then* STELLA *breaks the awkward pause.*]

STELLA [*to* VIOLET]. What are you working at?

VIOLET. A pair of socks for Old Allen. I always

give him a pair for his birthday. That's about a month from now.

MRS. PRATT. I hope you and Mrs. Jackson have got a lot of things ready for the Mission Room Fund Bazaar, Violet? We want to clear off our debt, and, if possible, have something in hand as well.

VIOLET. Oh yes. I've done some things and so has mother. I'll send them up in a day or two.

MRS. PRATT. And thank *you* so much, Lady Faringford, for the embroidered tea-cloth you sent. It is *sure* to sell!

LADY FARINGFORD. Let us hope so. It's extremely ugly. I bought it at the Kettlewell sale of work last year intending to give it to my poor sister Adelaide. But afterwards I hadn't the heart. So I sent it to your bazaar instead. [*Another awkward pause. Poor* MRS. PRATT *smiles nervously.*]

MRS. JACKSON. Vi, my dear, won't you play us something?

STELLA. Do, Vi. We never have any music at the Hall now Fraulein Schmidt has gone.

VIOLET. Very well, if you'd really like it.

[*Rises and goes to piano.*

LADY FARINGFORD [*to* MRS. JACKSON]. You remember her? She was Stella's governess. Quite an intelligent, good creature. But I dare say you never met her. She never used to come down to dinner. I always think German governesses so much more satisfactory than English. You see, there's never any question about having to treat *them* as ladies. And then they're always so plain. That's a great advantage. And German is such a useful language, far more useful for a young girl than French. There are so many more books she can be allowed to read in it. French can be learnt later—and should be in my opinion.

MRS. PRATT [*who has recovered from the shock of the tea-cloth incident*]. I quite agree with you, Lady Faringford.

But the Rector is less strict in these matters. He allowed my girls to begin French directly they went to school, at Miss Thursby's. But I'm bound to say they never seem to have learnt any. So perhaps it did no harm.

MRS. JACKSON. Yes, I have always heard Miss Thursby's was an excellent school.

[VIOLET *begins to play. The piece selected is the second movement of Beethoven's twenty-seventh Sonata, sometimes called "The Conversation with the Beloved." Before she has played a dozen bars, however,* BAINES, *the* JACKSONS' *butler, enters, and she stops.*]

BAINES [*going up to* MRS. PRATT, *and speaking in an undertone*]. If you please, Madam, Simmonds is here asking if you could see him. They sent him on from the Rectory.

MRS. PRATT. Simmonds? Did he say his business?

BAINES [*coughs discreetly*]. Something about *Mrs.* Simmonds, I think, Madam.

MRS. PRATT. Of course, I remember. I will come in a moment. [*Rising.*] You'll excuse me, won't you, dear Mrs. Jackson? It's Mrs. Simmonds. Foolish woman, she's had another baby. Her husband is in the hall. I shall probably have to run over to the Rectory for some things for her.

MRS. JACKSON [*rising at once*]. Oh no, you mustn't do that. I am sure we have everything necessary here, soup and jelly and flannel, and anything else you think wise. And, of course, they will want some money. I had better come and see Simmonds with you. Then we can tell the housekeeper to put the things together for him.

MRS. PRATT. But it's giving you so much trouble.

MRS. JACKSON. Not in the least. It's no trouble. And I can't have you running away and leaving us before the Rector has finished his cigar. That would never do.

VIOLET [*rising*]. Can I do anything, mother?

MRS. JACKSON. No, dear. I can manage quite well.

You stay here and entertain Lady Faringford and Stella. We shan't be five minutes.

[MRS. JACKSON *hurries out beaming with benevolence, closely attended by* MRS. PRATT. BAINES *follows them out with dignity, refusing to allow his composure to be ruffled by so trivial an incident as the arrival of a cottager's baby.*]

VIOLET. Poor Mrs. Simmonds. I do hope the baby will be all right.

LADY FARINGFORD. I have no doubt it will. When people have far more children already than is either convenient or necessary their babies always exhibit extraordinary vitality. Nothing seems to kill them. But you were going to play to us, dear.

[VIOLET *returns to piano and begins to play again.* STELLA *listens with obvious pleasure.* LADY FARINGFORD *fidgets, picks up book, yawns, puts it down again, and generally shows by her manner that she is bored to death by the music. Presently she succeeds in attracting* STELLA'S *attention by tapping gently with her fan, and beckons to her.* STELLA *gets up resignedly and goes over to sit by her mother, who begins to talk to her under cover of the music.*]

By the way, Stella, how are things going between you and Henry ?

STELLA. What do you mean, mother ?

LADY FARINGFORD. Has he asked you to marry him yet ?

STELLA. No.

LADY FARINGFORD. Strange ! I thought he would have done so before now. I have given him several opportunities.

STELLA. Mother !

LADY FARINGFORD. He is going to, I suppose ?

STELLA. I don't know

LADY FARINGFORD. Nonsense, child. Of course you do. A girl always knows when a man wants to propose

to her, unless she is perfectly idiotic. He will certainly propose if you give him proper encouragement. [*Persuasively.*] And when he does you will accept him?

STELLA [*thoughtfully*]. I'm not sure.

LADY FARINGFORD. Not sure? Why not? You like him, don't you? . . . I can't think who invented music after dinner. One can hardly hear one's self speak. . . . As I was saying, you like him?

STELLA. Oh yes. I like him.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then of course you will accept him. When a man proposes to a girl and she likes him, and he is well off and otherwise eligible, she should always accept him.

STELLA. But—[*hesitates*]—I don't love him, mother.

LADY FARINGFORD. My dear, you must not expect impossibilities. Love matches aren't very common among people of our class. And they're by no means always successful either. Quite the contrary. If you marry a man you like you may come to love him—in time. But if you marry the man you love you may easily come to loathe him.

STELLA [*sighs*]. Well, I suppose I shall have to marry him in the end.

LADY FARINGFORD. Of course you will. And I'm sure you might do a great deal worse. The Jacksons are really very well off. The business has grown enormously in the last few years. Of course, they're *parvenus*. But everybody one meets nowadays is either a *parvenu* or a pauper. And really girls are so numerous just now they can't afford to be as particular as they were. Henry is the only son.

STELLA. No, mother. There's Eustace.

LADY FARINGFORD. I don't count Eustace. He went away years ago—to one of the Colonies, I believe—and doubtless came to a bad end. Probably he's dead by now.

STELLA. Mother! How can you say such terrible things!

LADY FARINGFORD. Nonsense. Of course he's dead. And a very good thing, too. . . . Really, what a noise our good Violet is making. . . . If he weren't dead one would have heard something of him. That sort of young man always makes himself felt by his relatives as long as the breath's in his body.

STELLA. But if he's abroad——

LADY FARINGFORD. Then he would write—for money. People in the Colonies always do write for money. You don't remember him, do you?

STELLA. Hardly at all. I've seen him, of course.

LADY FARINGFORD. Ah! He was a handsome fellow. Clever, too. But a thorough detrimental. It's just as well he went to the Colonies. No, my dear, you can't do better than accept Henry. He'll be quite a rich man some day, and he's really very fairly presentable. And his father will get into Parliament. Not that that means anything nowadays. Here he is.

[LADY FARINGFORD *leans back in her corner of the sofa, and makes a decent pretence of having listened to the music as the men enter from the drawing-room. They are* SIR JOHN FARINGFORD, *the* RECTOR, MR. JACKSON, *and* HENRY.]

MR. JACKSON. Hullo, all alone, Lady Faringford? What's become of Maria—and Mrs. Pratt?

VIOLET [*breaking off in the middle of her playing and rising from the piano*]. Simmonds came to ask if he could see Mrs. Pratt. Mrs. Simmonds is ill. Mother and Mrs. Pratt are putting some things together for him to take to her.

LADY FARINGFORD [*sweetly*]. Your daughter has been entertaining us with her charming music while Mrs. Jackson was away. What was that little piece you were playing, dear?

VIOLET. A sonata of Beethoven, Lady Faringford.

LADY FARINGFORD. Indeed? Very pretty.

THE RECTOR. You are going to play at our next Parish concert, I hope, Miss Jackson?

VIOLET. Yes. Mrs. Pratt and I have been getting out the programme.

SIR JOHN. Miss Jackson is a tower of strength in the musical line. Stella hardly plays a note. I always tell my wife it's the result of having had a German governess. How can you expect a child to learn music in German?

LADY FARINGFORD. I believe all modern music is written in German. It certainly sounds like it.

HENRY [*joining* STELLA, *who has made her escape from her mother to the other side of the room at the first opportunity*]. I hope you haven't been dull, Miss Faringford, while my mother has been out of the room. It's shocking of her to leave her guests in this way.

STELLA. Not at all. Vi has been playing to us. It has been delightful.

HENRY. You're very fond of music, aren't you?

STELLA. Yes. It's curious, when I was a child they made me learn, of course, but I didn't care a bit about it. I was awfully troublesome over my lessons, I remember. So I made nothing of it. And now, when I'd give anything to be able to play, I can't.

HENRY. Why don't you take it up again?

STELLA. I do try sometimes. Sometimes I set to work and practise feverishly for a whole week. But it doesn't last.

HENRY. You should persevere.

STELLA. I know, but I don't. I suppose I'm lazy. But that's like me. I want to do things. I see I *ought* to do them. But somehow they don't get done. I expect you can't understand that?

HENRY. I'm afraid I can't. If I want a thing I take the necessary steps to get it. That's what "wanting" means with me.

STELLA [*thoughtfully*]. And do you always get it?

HENRY. Generally. A man can generally get a thing in the end if he gives his mind to it.

STELLA. Most people wouldn't say that.

HENRY. That's because most people don't know what they want. Instead of fixing their mind on one thing, and being determined to get it, they keep aiming first at one thing and then at another. So of course they don't get anything. They don't deserve to.

STELLA [*rather wistfully*]. Most people don't *aim* at all. They simply take what comes.

HENRY. Surely *you* don't do that?

STELLA. I believe I do. [*Laughing.*] You see, there's really not room for more than one *will* in any family. In our family it's mamma's. Mamma always knows what she wants—like you. The worst of it is she doesn't always know what *we* want.

HENRY. I see. What happens then?

STELLA. Oh, mamma wins. We struggle a little sometimes, papa and I. But she gets her way in the end.

[*There is silence between them for a moment.* HENRY *looks round, and, noticing everybody else immersed in conversation, feels that his opportunity has come for laying his hand and heart at* MISS FARINGFORD'S *feet. He drops his voice to a confidential undertone and sets about it.*]

HENRY. Miss Faringford, there's something I want to say to you.

STELLA. That sounds very serious.

HENRY. It is serious—to me. It's something I've wanted to tell you for a long time.

STELLA [*rising nervously*]. Well, don't tell it me to-night. Later on, perhaps. I don't think I want to hear about serious things to-night.

HENRY [*rising also*]. When may I tell it to you?

STELLA. I don't know. Some time, perhaps. But not now. Here's your mother come back with Mrs. Pratt.

[*At this opportune moment* MRS. JACKSON *and* MRS. PRATT *do, as a matter of fact, re-enter from their ministrations to poor* SIMMONDS, *and* STELLA, *for the moment, is saved. She goes towards them.*]

MRS. JACKSON. Lady Faringford, what will you think of me for leaving you for so long? But the housekeeper was out. She had gone down to the village to see her niece, who is ill. So Mrs. Pratt and I had to put the things together for Simmonds ourselves. Mrs. Simmonds has another baby, Samuel.

MRS. PRATT. The poor are terribly thoughtless in these matters. That makes her sixth. But I'm bound to say poor Simmonds seemed quite conscious of his folly.

LADY FARINGFORD. That, at least, is satisfactory. But I have no hope that it will affect his future conduct. He will go on having children—at the usual intervals—until he dies. And then they will all come on the parish.

MRS. JACKSON [*puzzled*]. But is Simmonds going to die? He said nothing about it. But, of course, he was rather flurried.

MR. JACKSON [*staggered for the moment by the fatuity of his wife's remark, but recovering himself gamely.*] I hope you sent whatever was necessary, Maria?

MRS. PRATT. Far more. I really had to interfere to prevent Mrs. Jackson from emptying her store cupboard.

THE RECTOR. Well, well, I dare say poor Mrs. Simmonds will find a use for everything.

MR. JACKSON. No doubt. And besides, with an election in prospect——

SIR JOHN. Exactly; it can do no harm.

MR. JACKSON. By the way, Sir John, as chairman of my election committee, there's a point on which I want your advice. The local branch of the Independent Order of Good Templars wrote to me ten days ago asking for a subscription. So I sent five guineas.

SIR JOHN. Quite right. The Temperance Vote must be reckoned with in this Division.

MR. JACKSON. Just so. But the Good Templars published the fact in the local newspaper.

SIR JOHN. Well, that's what you wanted, wasn't it?

MR. JACKSON. Ye-es. No doubt. But I forgot that the Secretary of the local branch of the Licensed Victuallers' Association would be sure to see the paragraph, and write to me for an explanation.

SIR JOHN. I see. Did he?

MR. JACKSON. Yes.

SIR JOHN. Ah! What did you do?

MR. JACKSON. I was in some doubt. But Sims, my agent, told me the Licensed Victuallers had a Benevolent Fund or something. So I sent ten guineas to that. That seemed the best way out of the difficulty.

SIR JOHN. Much the best, much the best.

[*Trying to escape.*

MR. JACKSON [*detaining him*]. But that's not the end of the matter. For now the Good Templars have written to ask if I am prepared to support any legislation designed to combat the evil of the Drink Traffic. And the Licensed Victuallers want to know if I will pledge myself to oppose any Bill which aims at the reduction of the sale of intoxicating liquors.

SIR JOHN. Hum! They rather had you there!

MR. JACKSON. Yes. . . . However, I think I've got out of it all right. I've written a letter to the Licensed Victuallers to say I'm not in favour of unduly restricting the sale of liquor in the interests of Temperance Propaganda. And I've written another to the Good Templars saying that I'm quite in favour of Temperance Propaganda providing it doesn't unduly restrict the sale of intoxicating liquor. I think that meets the case?

SIR JOHN. I see. Running with the hare and hunting with the hounds, eh? Quite right. I think you got out

of it very well. And now we really must be saying good-night. [*To* LADY FARINGFORD.] Come, my dear, it's time we were going.

MRS. JACKSON. Oh, you mustn't go yet. It's quite early.

LADY FARINGFORD. We are early people. [*Rises.* We really must go. Stella, my dear, we must be putting on our things.

HENRY. I'll ask if your carriage is round. [*Rings.*

LADY FARINGFORD. If you will be so good. I told the coachman ten. I do hope it's stopped raining. I believe the farmers want it, but it's so bad for the horses.

HENRY [*to* BAINES, *who appears in answer to his ring*]. Lady Faringford's carriage.

BAINES. It's at the door, sir.

HENRY. Very well. [*Exit* BAINES.

LADY FARINGFORD. Good-night, then, Mrs. Jackson. Such a *pleasant* evening. Come, Stella.

[*General adieux. The* FARINGFORDS *and* STELLA *go out escorted by* HENRY *and* MR. JACKSON.]

MRS. PRATT. I think *we* ought to be going, too.

MRS. JACKSON. No, no. You mustn't run away like that. I've not had a moment to speak to the Rector. And I'm sure Vi will want to talk to you about the next concert. Sit down again, Mrs. Pratt. [*Re-enter* HENRY *and* MR. JACKSON.] What sort of a night is it, Samuel? Has it stopped raining?

[*Sits down beside the* RECTOR *on the sofa.*

MR. JACKSON. Yes; it's not raining now. But it's very dark.

THE RECTOR. The moon's full, too. But I suppose there's too much cloud about.

MRS. JACKSON. I do hope it will be lighter before you have to go home. It's such a dark road from here to the Rectory.

THE RECTOR. We have a lantern. We always bring it when we go out at night. We don't trust the moon. She's fickle, Mrs. Jackson, like all her sex.

MRS. JACKSON. Rector, if you talk like that I shall scold you. And so will Mrs. Pratt.

[*There is a sudden noise of footsteps outside. Then the door opens hurriedly, and* BAINES *appears. He crosses at once to* MR. JACKSON, *and speaks in a sort of breathless undertone.*]

BAINES. If you please, sir——

MR. JACKSON. Well, what is it, Baines?

BAINES. If you please, sir, it's . . . [*confidentially*] Mr. Eustace. [MR. JACKSON *turns sharply round.*] He was lying just by the front door.

MR. JACKSON. Mr. Eustace!

MRS. JACKSON [*hearing the name and jumping up from her seat*]. Eustace!

BAINES. Yes, sir. Yes, madam. Thomas saw him just as he was coming in after shutting the front gate. The moon came out for a moment and he saw him. He's fainted, sir. At least, I think so.

MRS. JACKSON. I must go to him.

[*Hurries towards door.*

MR. JACKSON. No. Not you, Maria. I'll go.

[*The door opens.*

BAINES. I think they're bringing him in here, sir.

Enter the TWO FOOTMEN, *carrying a draggled and dishevelled body by the shoulders and the heels. The room becomes a scene of excitement and confusion, everybody talking at once and getting into each other's way. Chairs are pushed this way and that, and the sofa is dragged out into the middle of the room to receive the body as it is brought in.*

MRS. JACKSON. Oh, my poor boy! My poor dear boy!

[*Rushes to him.*

VIOLET. Wait a minute. Put him here.

MRS. JACKSON. Oh, he's dead ! He's dead ! I know he's dead !

VIOLET. Hush, mother. Some brandy, quick, Baines. And some cold water. I think he's only fainted.

[*Puts cushion under his head and opens shirt at neck.*]

THE RECTOR. Poor fellow !

MRS. PRATT [*noticing the condition of* EUSTACE'S *boots*]. Oh, Mrs. Jackson. Your sofa ! It will be utterly ruined.

MRS. JACKSON [*bending over him, wild with anxiety*]. Oh, I wish they'd be quick with the brandy. Henry, go at once for Dr. Glaisher.

THE RECTOR. Let *me* go. We pass his house anyway. And we mustn't stay any longer. We should only be in the way here. Come, my dear.

Enter BAINES *with brandy and jug of water.*

MRS. PRATT. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Jackson. No. You mustn't stir. And I do hope he'll be all right soon. We'll send Dr. Glaisher round at once.

THE RECTOR. Good-bye. [*To* HENRY.] Don't come with me, my dear fellow. Baines can find my things. Stay and look after your brother.

[THE RECTOR *and* MRS. PRATT *flurry out, followed by* BAINES. *Meantime* MRS. JACKSON *has been trying to force some brandy between the clenched teeth of the patient.*]

VIOLET. Your handkerchief, Henry. Quick.

[HENRY *gives it to her. She dips it in jug, wrings it out and, kneeling beside the sofa, puts it over patient's forehead by way of bandage.*]

MRS. JACKSON [*lamentably*]. He doesn't stir.

MR. JACKSON. I can feel his heart beating a little, I think. But I'm not sure.

MRS. JACKSON. Oh, will he *never* come round! I *wish* Dr. Glaisher would come. If he were to die!

VIOLET [*soothing her*]. Hush, mother. He's only fainted. Didn't you hear father say he could hear his heart beating?

MRS. JACKSON. Is there anything else we could do? My salts!

VIOLET [*rising*]. I'll get them, mother.

MRS. JACKSON. They're on my dressing-table. [VIOLET *nods and goes out quickly.*] . . . No, I remember I had them in the library this morning. I'll go and look. Or was it the breakfast-room? I'm not sure. Oh dear, oh dear, poor darling Eustace!

[*And the poor old lady waddles out in a burst of tears.*]

MR. JACKSON. She'll never find them. You go, Henry, and help her. Try the breakfast-room.

[HENRY *goes out after his mother, and* MR. JACKSON *is left alone with his prostrate son. For a minute or so he fusses round, making futile and rather grotesque efforts to restore him to consciousness, re-moistening the bandage on his forehead and renewing the attempt to administer brandy. Then* VIOLET'S *voice is heard through the door, which is left open.*]

VIOLET [*without*]. Father!

MR. JACKSON [*going to door, hurriedly*]. Yes, yes, what *is* it?

Enter VIOLET.

VIOLET. Have you your keys? Mother thinks she may have left her salts on your desk in the library, and it's locked.

MR. JACKSON [*frantic with nervous irritation*]. Tck! Here they are. [VIOLET *going.*] I'd better come or you'll disturb all my papers.

[MR. JACKSON *fusses out after his daughter, and for a minute or so the patient is left alone. The patient takes advantage of this to raise himself cautiously from his recumbent posture and wring out the bandage on his forehead, which he finds disagreeably wet. He also removes a novel, with a bright red cover, inconsiderately left on the sofa, which somewhat interfered with his comfort as he lay upon it. He reads the title on the back of it, which is "Hester's Escape," and smiles grimly at his sister's taste in fiction. Hearing noise of returning footsteps, he hurriedly replaces the book on the sofa and the bandage on his forehead, and resumes his fainting condition as his mother re-enters with* HENRY.]

MRS. JACKSON [*piteously*]. They're *not* in the library. Where *can* I have put them?

HENRY. The others will find them. Violet is looking in your bedroom. She always finds things. And the governor is in the breakfast-room. They'll be here in a moment.

Enter VIOLET *with salts in her hand, followed at a short interval by* MR. JACKSON.

MRS. JACKSON. Thanks, dear. [*Bending over the patient and holding the salts tremulously to his nose, but entirely forgetting to take out the stopper.*] Where were they?

VIOLET. In the dining-room, on the writing-table.

MRS. JACKSON. Oh yes, I remember. I had them there at lunch time. I *knew* I had put them somewhere.

HENRY [*irritably*]. There's no use holding those salts to his nose unless you take out the stopper, mother.

[MRS. JACKSON *fumbles with stopper. Patient stirs slightly and turns away his head.*]

MR. JACKSON. He's coming round. He moved a little. Try him with some more brandy.

[MRS. JACKSON *puts down salts and takes up brandy,*

which she pours into patient's mouth. He chokes a little, heaves a realistic sigh of returning consciousness, opens his eyes, then raises himself and looks round.]

EUSTACE [*faintly*]. Is that you, mother?

MRS. JACKSON [*overjoyed*]. Yes, dear, yes.

EUSTACE [*closing his eyes again*]. Where am I?

MRS. JACKSON. At home, dear. Your own home. Oh, he's not dead! He's not dead!

[*Embraces him, sobbing passionately as the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

SCENE.—*The breakfast-room at the* JACKSONS'. *A round breakfast-table occupies the centre of the stage, laid with cloth, tea and coffee things, and various dishes. The fireplace is on the left, and on either side of it are leather-covered arm-chairs. There is a large French window, open, at the back of the stage, through which is seen the garden bathed in summer sunshine. A door on the left leads to the hall. A night has passed since the Prodigal's return.* MR. JACKSON, HENRY, *and* VIOLET *are at breakfast,* VIOLET *having charge of the coffee,* MR. JACKSON *of the bacon dish.* HENRY *is reading "The Gloucester Chronicle" in the intervals of eating his bacon.* VIOLET *is reading letters.*

HENRY [*holding out cup*]. More coffee, please, Violet. [*To* MR. JACKSON.] Wenhams have failed, father.

MR. JACKSON. It's only what we expected, isn't it?

HENRY. Yes. Forty thousand, they say here. But, of course, it's only a guess. No one can know till the accounts are made up.

MR. JACKSON. They've been shaky for some time. Well, how is he?

[*This to* MRS. JACKSON, *who enters at this moment from hall. She has quite recovered her normal placidity, and bears no resemblance to the tragic, tear-stained old lady whom we last saw.*]

MRS. JACKSON. Much better. He looks quite a different person.

MR. JACKSON. Did he eat any breakfast?

MRS. JACKSON. He hasn't had any yet. At least, only a cup of tea. He says he'd rather come down. He's getting up now.

VIOLET. Didn't Dr. Glaisher say he was to stay in bed?

MRS. JACKSON. Yes. But if he wants to come down I don't think it can do any harm. He can lie down on the sofa till lunch if he feels tired.

MR. JACKSON. What time is Glaisher coming?

VIOLET. Half-past ten, he said.

HENRY. Has Eustace explained how he came to be lying in the drive in that state? Last night we could get nothing out of him.

MRS. JACKSON. No wonder. He was dazed, poor boy. He had walked all the way from London, and had had nothing to eat.

HENRY [*irritably*]. How was it he was *in* London? He was sent to Australia.

MRS. JACKSON. He *had* been in Australia. He worked his passage home.

MR. JACKSON. His money is all gone, I suppose—the thousand pounds I gave him?

MRS. JACKSON [*placidly*]. I don't know, Samuel. I didn't ask.

MR. JACKSON. Humph! . . . [*Pause.*] I'll trouble you for the toast, please, Henry.

HENRY. I suppose we'd better make inquiries about Wenhams, father? It might be worth our while to buy the mill if it goes cheap. Then we could run it and ours together.

MR. JACKSON. Just so. Will you see to that?

[HENRY *nods.*

MRS. JACKSON. I've got a letter to Aunt Isabel to send by the early post. I ought to have written it last night. Will you put it into the box for me, Samuel, as you go to the mill?

MR. JACKSON. Certainly, my dear.

[MRS. JACKSON *goes to writing-table and writes her letter.*]

HENRY [*to his father*]. Very tiresome Eustace turning up in that disreputable condition last night. What will Stella think?

MR. JACKSON. It's lucky the Faringfords had gone before he was brought in.

HENRY. The Pratts hadn't. Mrs. Pratt will have told the entire village before lunch time.

VIOLET. I don't see why we should mind if she does. There's nothing to be ashamed of.

[*Rising and going over to fireplace, having finished her breakfast.*

HENRY [*impatiently*]. Well, we won't discuss it.

[*Returns to his paper.*

MR. JACKSON [*moving towards* HENRY, *and speaking in an undertone*]. By the way, Henry, did you say anything to Stella last night?

HENRY [*hesitates*]. No!

MR. JACKSON. I thought you were going to.

HENRY. I was. In fact, I did begin. But she didn't let me finish. I suppose she didn't understand what I was going to say.

MR. JACKSON. Don't put it off too long. There may be an election any day now, and the Faringford influence means a great deal.

HENRY. You've got Faringford's influence already. He's chairman of your Committee.

MR. JACKSON. That's true. Still, he'll take more trouble when I'm one of the family, so to speak. Yes, I shouldn't put it off if I were you.

HENRY. Very well, father.

MR. JACKSON. Of course, Faringford is as poor as Job. The estate's mortgaged up to the hilt. And anything there is after he and Lady Faringford go out of the coach—if there is anything—will go to the son. Stella won't have a sixpence. Still, they're good people—position

in the county and all that. And *you'll* have enough money for both.

HENRY. Yes. Especially if we get hold of Wenhams' mill. I'm sure I could make a good thing out of that. We'd put in turbines as we did here, get new machinery, and double our output.

MR. JACKSON. How are the turbines working, by the way?

HENRY. All right. And they'll go still better when the new sluices are done. [*Rising.*] Well, I shall go over to the mill now. Are you coming?

MR. JACKSON. In a moment.

[*Finishes his coffee and rises.*

VIOLET. Shall I get your hat and stick, father?

MR. JACKSON. Do, dear. [VIOLET *goes out in quest of these.*] Is your letter ready, Maria?

MRS. JACKSON. Just done. [*Fastens it up, rising.*] You won't forget it, will you?

MR. JACKSON. No. Or, if I do, Henry will remind me.

MRS. JACKSON [*to* HENRY, *who has collected his hat and papers, and is about to start for the mill*]. Won't you wait and see Eustace before you go, Henry? He'll be down in a moment.

HENRY. It doesn't matter. I shall see him soon enough. Coming, father?

[*Goes out by French window, crosses the lawn, and disappears.*

MRS. JACKSON. I wish Henry could have stayed to see Eustace before he started.

MR. JACKSON. I dare say he'll be over in the course of the morning.

VIOLET [*re-entering*]. Here're your hat and stick, father.

MR. JACKSON. That's a good girl. [*Kisses her.*] Good-bye. I shall be in for lunch.

[*Goes out by French window, following* HENRY.

MRS. JACKSON [*going to bacon dish and lifting cover*]. We must order some more bacon. Or do you think Eustace had better have an egg?

VIOLET. Shall I go up and ask him?

MRS. JACKSON. Do, dear. And I wonder if you'd see cook at the same time and ask her if she's wanting anything? I have to go into the village.

VIOLET. Very well, mother.

[VIOLET *goes out on these errands.* MRS. JACKSON *takes away plates to sideboard, clears a place for* EUSTACE *where* HENRY *sat, and lays for him.*]

FOOTMAN [*announcing*]. Dr. Glaisher.

[DR. GLAISHER *enters, very fussy and self-important, a worthy, seedy little man, who has long since forgotten all the medicine he ever knew.*]

MRS. JACKSON [*shaking hands*]. Oh, Doctor. Good morning. [*To* FOOTMAN.] Tell Mr. Eustace Dr. Glaisher is here. [FOOTMAN *goes out.*

DR. GLAISHER [*drawing off gloves in his best professional manner, and dropping them one after the other into his silk hat, which he has placed on the table.*] Well, how does he seem? Going on well?

MRS. JACKSON. Quite well, I think.

DR. GLAISHER. Did he have a good night?

MRS. JACKSON. Excellent, he says.

DR. GLAISHER. Ah! [*Nods sagely.*] Just so. Shall I go up to him?

MRS. JACKSON. He's coming down for breakfast. He'll be here in a moment.

DR. GLAISHER. Coming down, is he? Come, that looks satisfactory! Still, we must be careful. No overfatigue! His condition last night gave cause for considerable anxiety. Indeed, I may say that if I had not fortunately been sent for at once and applied the necessary

remedies, there was distinct danger of collapse—um ! distinct danger.

MRS. JACKSON. Oh, Doctor !

[*With singular want of tact,* EUSTACE *elects to enter at this moment, looking in quite robust health, and wearing an admirable suit of clothes.*]

DR. GLAISHER. Ah, here he is.

EUSTACE [*cheerily*]. Good morning, mother. [*Kisses her.*] Hullo, Doctor. Come to see me ?

DR. GLAISHER [*shaking hands*]. Well, and how are we this morning ?

EUSTACE. Getting on all right, I think. A bit limp and washed-out, perhaps.

DR. GLAISHER. Just so. The temperature normal ? No fever ? [*Touches forehead.*] That's right. Pulse ? [*Feels it.*] A little irregular, perhaps. But nothing serious. Excitement due to over-fatigue, no doubt. Now let me see your tongue. [*Does so. Nods sagely.*] Just so. As I should have expected. *Just* as I should have expected, dear Mrs. Jackson. Appetite not very good, I suppose ?

EUSTACE. Er—not very.

DR. GLAISHER. Just so. Just so.

[*Nods more sagaciously than ever.*

EUSTACE [*gaily*]. Not dead yet, eh, Doctor ?

MRS. JACKSON. My dear !

DR. GLAISHER [*with heavy geniality*]. We shall pull you through. Oh, we shall pull you through. But you must take care of yourself for a few days. No excitement ! No over-fatigue. The system wants *tone* a little, wants *tone.*

EUSTACE. I see. I'm to take it easy, in fact, for a bit, eh ?

DR. GLAISHER. Just so.

EUSTACE. I won't forget. I say, what clever beggars

you doctors are ! You feel a fellow's pulse and look at his tongue, and you know *all* about him at once. Don't you ?

DR. GLAISHER [*pleased*]. Not *all* perhaps. But there are indications, symptoms, which the professional man can interpret . . .

EUSTACE [*interrupting*]. Quite extraordinary. I say, what do you think of these clothes ? Not bad, are they ? They're Henry's. But *I* chose them—out of his wardrobe. Poor old Henry !

MRS. JACKSON. How naughty of you, Eustace. I'm sure Henry won't like it.

EUSTACE. Of course he won't, mother dear. Nobody does like his clothes being worn by some one else. But I must wear something, you know. I can't come down to breakfast in a suit of pyjamas. Besides, they're Henry's pyjamas.

MRS. JACKSON. But I told Thomas specially to put out an old suit of your father's for you. Didn't he do it ?

EUSTACE. Yes. But I can't wear the governor's clothes, you know. We haven't the same figure. I say, I'd better ring for breakfast. [*Does so.*

MRS. JACKSON. Have you ordered it, dear ? I sent Vi up to ask whether you'd like bacon or eggs.

EUSTACE. Yes. Violet asked me. I said bacon *and* eggs. Hullo, Vi, you're just in time to pour out my coffee.

[*This to* VIOLET, *who re-enters at this moment from interviewing the cook and otherwise attending to her mother's household duties.*]

DR. GLAISHER [*shakes hands with* VIOLET]. Well, I must be off to my other patients. [*To* MRS. JACKSON.] Good-bye, Mrs. Jackson. He is going on well—quite as well as can be expected, that is. There are no fresh symptoms of an unfavourable character. But you must keep him quiet for a few days. There are signs of nervousness about him, a sort of suppressed excitement, which I don't like. The system wants *tone*, decidedly wants *tone*. I'll

send him up a mixture to take. He has evidently been through some strain lately. I knew that directly I saw him last night. You can't deceive a doctor !

[MAN *brings in breakfast—rack of toast on table, coffee and rolls on sideboard.*]

MRS. JACKSON [*anxiously*]. You don't think there's anything *serious* the matter ?

DR. GLAISHER. No ! no ! Let us hope not. The general constitution is sound enough. Not over strong, perhaps, but sound. And with youth on his side. Let me see, how old is he ?

MRS. JACKSON. Nine and twenty.

DR. GLAISHER [*taking refuge in his sage nod again*]. Just so. Just so. . . . [*Cheering up.*] Well, *good* morning. [*To* EUSTACE.] *Good* morning. And remember, quiet, perfectly quiet. I'll look in again to-morrow and see how he's getting on.

EUSTACE [*nods*]. Good-bye. [*Goes towards breakfast-table, where the* FOOTMAN *by now has placed coffee, toast, and bacon and eggs.*]

[DR. GLAISHER *shakes hands with* VIOLET *and goes out, followed by* FOOTMAN. VIOLET *seats herself at table to pour out* EUSTACE's *coffee.* MRS. JACKSON *draws up a chair, and sits by his side with placid contentment, watching him eat.*]

EUSTACE [*beginning his breakfast*]. Mother, I think I must become a doctor. It's the only profession I know of which seems to require no knowledge whatever. And it's the sort of thing I should do rather well.

MRS. JACKSON. I dare say, dear. You must speak to your father about it. . . . And now you must tell us *all* about yourself. What have you been doing all this time ? And why did you never write ?

EUSTACE. There was nothing to tell you—that you'd have liked to hear.

MRS. JACKSON. My dear, of course we should have liked to hear everything about you.

EUSTACE. I doubt it. No news is good news. I bet the governor thought that—and Henry.

MRS. JACKSON. No, no, dear. I assure you your father was quite anxious when we never heard—at first.

EUSTACE. Ah, well, if the governor was so anxious to know how I was he shouldn't have packed me off to Australia. I never could endure writing letters.

VIOLET. Still, you might have sent us word. It would have been kinder to mother.

EUSTACE [*laying his hand on his mother's as it lies on the arm of her chair*]. Poor mother. I suppose I was a brute. But I've not been very prosperous these five years, and as I'd nothing pleasant to say I thought I wouldn't write.

MRS. JACKSON. But what became of your money, dear? The thousand pounds your father gave you?

EUSTACE. I lost it.

MRS. JACKSON [*looking round vaguely as if* EUSTACE *might have dropped it somewhere on the carpet, in which case, of course, it ought to be picked up before some one treads on it*]. Lost it?

EUSTACE. Yes. Part of it went in a sheep farm. I suppose I was a bad farmer. Anyhow, the sheep died. The other part I put in a gold mine. I suppose I wasn't much of a miner. Anyhow, there was no gold in it. I was in the Mounted Police for a time. That was in Natal. It wasn't bad, but it didn't lead to anything. So I cleared out. I've been in a bank at Hong-Kong. I've driven a cable car in San Francisco. I've been a steward on a liner. I've been an actor, and I've been a journalist. I've tried my hand at most things, in fact. At one time I played in an orchestra.

MRS. JACKSON [*with fond pride*]. You were always fond of music.

EUSTACE [*dryly*]. Yes, I played the triangle—and took a whack at the big drum between times.

VIOLET. How absurd you are!

EUSTACE. Finally, I came home. That was when my experience as a steward came in. I worked my passage as one—if you can call it work! I was sick all the time.

MRS. JACKSON. How dreadful!

EUSTACE. It was—for the passengers.

VIOLET. How long ago was that?

EUSTACE. Only about a month. Since then I've been in London picking up a living one way or another. At last, when I found myself at the end of my tether, I started to walk here. And here I am.

MRS. JACKSON. My dear boy! You must have found it terribly muddy!

EUSTACE. I did. But life always is rather muddy, isn't it? At least, that's my experience.

MRS. JACKSON. But weren't you *very* tired?

EUSTACE. I was tired, of course. Give me some more coffee, Vi.

[*She does so.* EUSTACE *takes advantage of this to change the subject, gently but firmly.*]

Well, how have you all been at home? How's the governor?

MRS. JACKSON. He's been very well on the whole. His lumbago was rather troublesome at the end of last year. Otherwise he's been all right.

EUSTACE. Does he stick to business as close as ever?

MRS. JACKSON. Not quite. You see, Henry's a partner now. The firm is Jackson, Hartopp, and Jackson, and *he* takes a good deal of work off your father's shoulders. Henry is an excellent man of business.

[EUSTACE *nods.*]

Your father gives more of his time to public affairs now.

He's a magistrate, and been on the County Council for the last three years. And now he's standing for Parliament.

EUSTACE. The family's looking up in the world. The business is flourishing, then?

MRS. JACKSON. Oh yes. They've put in all new machinery in the last three years. And they've got turbines instead of the old water-wheels. That was Henry's idea. And now they can turn out a cheaper cloth than any of the mills round here.

EUSTACE. Cheaper? The governor used to despise cheap cloth.

MRS. JACKSON. Yes. But Henry said it was no use making cloth that would last a lifetime if people only wanted it to last twelve months. So he got over new machines—from America. And now they don't make any *good* cloth at all, and your father has trebled his income.

EUSTACE. Bravo, Henry!

MRS. JACKSON [*rises*]. And now I really must go down to the village and do my shopping. Have you got cook's list, Vi?

VIOLET. Yes, mother. But I'm coming, too. I promised Mrs. Pratt I'd call at the Vicarage before twelve to arrange about the next Mothers' Meeting.

MRS. JACKSON [*to* EUSTACE]. You'll find the paper there, dear, and some cigarettes—unless you think you oughtn't to smoke? I'll ring for them to clear away. And remember, dear [*kisses him gently on the forehead*], Dr. Glaisher said you were to keep *quite* quiet.

EUSTACE. All right, mother. I'll remember.

[MRS. JACKSON *and* VIOLET *go out to their shopping in the village.* EUSTACE, *who has risen to open the door for them, closes it, and returns slowly towards the table. The smile dies out of his face, and he gives a perceptible yawn. Then he chooses a cigarette, lights it in leisurely fashion, takes up a paper, selects an arm-chair by the fireplace, sits down, and*

begins to read. After a moment or two, enter BAINES, *with a tray in his hand.*]

You can clear away, Baines.

BAINES. Thank you, sir.

[*There is silence for an appreciable time, while* BAINES *goes on clearing the table. Then he speaks, but without pausing in his work.*]

I hope you're feeling better this morning, sir?

EUSTACE. Thanks, Baines, the doctor thinks I'm getting on all right.

BAINES. Narrow escape you had last night, sir. Thomas says the carriage wheels must have gone within a foot of your head.

EUSTACE. Thomas is a—I mean, does he say that?

BAINES. Curious thing we shouldn't have seen you, sir. We must have been that close! But it was a very dark night except when the moon was out. Then it was as bright as day almost. That was how he came to see you, sir.

EUSTACE. Oh, that was it, was it?

BAINES. Yes, sir. [*The subject interests him so much that for a moment he actually stops his clearing.*] You see, Thomas had just shut the gate after the carriage drove away and the moon happened to come out. . . .

EUSTACE [*bored*]. Quite so.

[BAINES, *snubbed, resumes his work with dignity. After an interval* EUSTACE *speaks again.*]

Whose carriage was it, by the way?

BAINES [*still offended*]. Sir John Faringford's, sir.

EUSTACE. Well, if one's head is to be driven over, it may as well be by a member of the aristocracy. Eh, Baines?

BAINES [*refusing to be mollified*]. Certainly, sir.

EUSTACE. Sir John often dine here nowadays?

BAINES. Yes, sir. And Lady Faringford, and Miss Stella.

EUSTACE. Miss Stella?

BAINES [*thawing a little, but not sufficiently appeased to pause in his work again*]. Their daughter, sir. But I dare say you wouldn't remember her. Only came out about a year ago.

EUSTACE. So my father is standing for Parliament, is he?

BAINES. Yes, sir.

EUSTACE. Will he get in?

BAINES. It's thought so, sir.

EUSTACE. By the way, which side is he on?

BAINES [*puzzled*]. I beg pardon, sir?

EUSTACE. Which side? Liberal or Conservative?

BAINES. Conservative, *of course*, sir. All the people round here are Conservative. All the gentry, that is.

EUSTACE. Most respectable, eh, Baines?

BAINES. Yes, sir.

[BAINES, *who has tray in his hand, hears bell, has a moment of indecision, then puts tray down on table.*]

Excuse me, sir.

[BAINES *goes out to answer the bell.* EUSTACE *returns to his newspaper. After a minute or so* BAINES *returns, and wanders about the room looking for something. Presently this proceeding gets on* EUSTACE'S *nerves, and he looks up irritably.*]

EUSTACE. What is it, Baines? Do you want anything?

BAINES. If you please, sir, Miss Faringford has called for a book Miss Violet promised to lend her.

[*Continues to search.*

EUSTACE [*after pause*]. Have you found it?

BAINES. No, sir.

EUSTACE [*bored, putting down paper on other arm-chair, and rising*]. I suppose I'd better see her.

[*He goes out.* BAINES *folds tablecloth and puts it away in sideboard drawer. Is just about to go out carrying tray, when enter* STELLA, *followed by* EUSTACE. BAINES *draws back to let them pass, and then goes out and closes the door.*]

EUSTACE. Come in, Miss Faringford. Perhaps I can find the book for you. What was it like?

STELLA. It was just an ordinary looking novel with a bright red cover—called "Hester's Escape."

EUSTACE [*wandering round the room, looking on the various tables, and then glancing hopelessly at the bookshelves*]. "Hester's Escape"? I seem to remember the name. But Vi will know where it is. You'd better wait till she comes in. Sit down. She'll be back directly.

[*This hospitable invitation is prompted partly by* EUSTACE'S *disinclination to search through those bookshelves, partly by his observing for the first time that* STELLA *is a very pretty girl, a fact which had escaped his notice in the relative darkness of the hall.*]

STELLA. Are you sure?

EUSTACE. Quite!

[STELLA *takes one of the arm-chairs by the fireplace.*]

You won't mind an untidy room, will you? I'm afraid I breakfasted late.

STELLA. I wonder you are down at all.

EUSTACE. Oh, I'm all right.

[*Turns round one of the chairs at the breakfast-table and sits near her.*

STELLA. Are you sure you ought to talk? People who have been ill ought to be quiet, oughtn't they?

EUSTACE. There's really nothing the matter with me.

STELLA. That's not what Mrs. Pratt told me. I met her in the village as I was coming here.

EUSTACE. Ah yes. She was present, of course, when I made my dramatic entry. Did she tell you about it? I hope it went off well?

STELLA. You frightened every one terribly, if that's what you mean. Mrs. Pratt says you looked *dreadful.* She thought you were going to die.

EUSTACE. Quite a thrilling experience for her. She ought to be very much obliged to me.

STELLA. How can you joke about it? You might really have died, you know! But when people have travelled all over the world, as you have done, and endured hardship and danger, I suppose death doesn't seem so terrible to them as it does to us who stay at home?

EUSTACE. I suppose not. They get used to it.

STELLA. Have you often been in great danger? Really great, I mean?

EUSTACE. I was at Singapore when the plague was there.

STELLA. How awful!

EUSTACE. Yes. It wasn't pleasant.

STELLA. I can't think how anyone can stay in England when he might go out and see the world. [*Enthusiastic.*] If I were a man I would go abroad and visit strange countries, and have wonderful adventures as you have done, not waste my life in a dull little village like Chedleigh.

EUSTACE. My dear Miss Faringford, the whole world is a dull little village like Chedleigh, and I've wasted my life in it.

Enter BAINES.

BAINES. If you please, sir, the Rector has called to ask how you are.

EUSTACE. Oh, bother. Say I'm very much obliged and I'm all right. [*Turns to* STELLA *again.*

BAINES. He said he would like to see you if you felt well enough, sir.

EUSTACE. Ah ! wait a minute. [*Thinks.*] Will you say I'm not well at all and quite unfit to see him this morning ?

BAINES. Very well, sir. [BAINES *goes out.*

STELLA [*rising*]. And now I must go. I'm only tiring you, and I expect you oughtn't to talk.

EUSTACE. But I assure you——

STELLA. And as you're quite unfit to see visitors——

EUSTACE. I'm quite unfit to see the Rector. That's a very different thing. But I'm perfectly up to seeing you. Besides, Violet should be here directly, now. [*Persuasively.*] Sit down again.

STELLA [*hesitating*]. I don't think I *ought* to stay.

EUSTACE. I'm sure you ought. One should visit the sick, you know.

STELLA [*with a laugh*]. You don't seem quite able to make up your mind whether you're ill or well.

EUSTACE. No. I vary. I find it more convenient.

Re-enter BAINES.

Well, who is it *now*, Baines ?

BAINES. Lady Faringford.

[BAINES'S *remark is not a reply to* EUSTACE'S *question, nor yet a rebuke to his irritability, though it sounds not unlike the latter. He is merely announcing a visitor with his usual impassive dignity. The announcement almost startles* STELLA *out of her self-control, and she rises hastily.* EUSTACE *is less impressed, as he has not yet made the acquaintance of* LADY FARINGFORD, *and is merely bored at being interrupted, but he also rises.*]

STELLA. Mamma !

LADY FARINGFORD [*ignoring her*]. Mr. Eustace Jackson, is it not ? How do you do ? [*Shakes hands frigidly.*] I heard in the village of your sudden return, and stopped the carriage to ask how you were. As the servant told me

you were downstairs, I thought I would come in for a moment.

EUSTACE. Very kind of you, Lady Faringford.

LADY FARINGFORD [*severely*]. You hardly appear as ill as I expected.

EUSTACE [*genially, quite refusing to be snubbed*]. I hope the disappointment is an agreeable one?

LADY FARINGFORD. *No* disappointments are agreeable, sir. [*Turning sternly to her daughter.*] And pray, what are *you* doing here, Stella?

EUSTACE [*still maddeningly genial*]. Miss Faringford called for a book my sister lent her last night, "Hester's Escape." I persuaded her to come in and sit down till Violet returned.

LADY FARINGFORD. You are expecting her soon?

EUSTACE. Every moment.

LADY FARINGFORD. Ah! Then I don't think we can wait.

EUSTACE. But Miss Faringford's book. . . . She mustn't go away without it. Sit down for a moment while I see if I can find it. [*To* STELLA.] A bright red cover, I think you said? [*Looks round the room for it.*

LADY FARINGFORD [*icily*]. Pray don't trouble, Mr. Jackson.

EUSTACE. "Hester's Escape"? I'm sure I've seen it somewhere. [*Thinks a moment.*] I know! It was in the drawing-room last night. Excuse me for a moment. I'll go and get it.

[EUSTACE *goes out in quest of the book, which indeed is the very one which interfered with his comfort on the sofa the previous evening. The moment he has left the room,* LADY FARINGFORD *turns wrathfully on her daughter.*]

LADY FARINGFORD. Really, Stella, I'm surprised at you!

STELLA. What is it, mamma?

LADY FARINGFORD. You know perfectly well. How long have you been here?

STELLA. About ten minutes. A quarter of an hour, perhaps.

LADY FARINGFORD. Do you make a habit of paying morning calls upon young men without a chaperon?

STELLA. No, mamma.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then I hope you will not begin to do so.

STELLA [*goaded by her tone to the nearest approach to rebellion of which she is capable*]. I came to call for a book which Vi promised to lend me. Vi was out, and Mr. Jackson very kindly asked me to come in and wait. What harm is there in that?

LADY FARINGFORD. There is every harm. Understand, please, that Mr. Eustace Jackson is not a suitable acquaintance for you.

STELLA. He is Henry's brother. You have no objection to my knowing Henry.

LADY FARINGFORD. That is quite different. Henry has a large income and excellent prospects. He is a man whom any young girl may be allowed to know. Eustace is a mere ne'er-do-well.

STELLA. Am I never to speak to anyone who isn't rich? The Du Cranes aren't rich, or the Vere-Anstruthers. Yet we know them. We aren't rich ourselves, if it comes to that.

LADY FARINGFORD. That has nothing to do with it. The Du Cranes and poor George Anstruther are gentlepeople. The Jacksons are tradesmen.

STELLA. I think people make far too much fuss about being "gentlepeople."

LADY FARINGFORD. Then I hope you won't say so. I don't like this pernicious modern jargon about shopkeepers and gentlefolk being much the same. There's far too much truth in it to be agreeable.

STELLA [*obstinately*]. If it's true, why shouldn't we say it?

LADY FARINGFORD. Because we have everything to lose by doing so. We were born into this world with what is called position. Owing to that position we are received everywhere, flattered, made much of. Though we are poor, rich people are eager to invite us to their houses and marry our daughters. So much the better for us. But if we began telling people that position was all moonshine, family an antiquated superstition, and many duchesses far less like ladies than their maids, the world would ultimately discover that what we were saying was perfectly true. Whereupon we should lose the very comfortable niche in the social system which we at present enjoy, and—who knows?—might actually be reduced in the end to doing something useful for our living like other people. No, no, my dear, rank and birth and the peerage *may* be all nonsense, but it isn't *our* business to say so. Leave that to vulgar people who have something to gain by it. *Noblesse oblige!*

[*This luminous exposition of the* FARINGFORD *social creed has just reached its allotted end when* EUSTACE *re-enters with the missing book.*]

EUSTACE. Here's the book, Miss Faringford. I hope you haven't had to wait too long? It was in the drawing-room, as I thought, but it had got put away under some papers.

STELLA. Thank you so much.

LADY FARINGFORD [*rising, icily*]. Good-bye, Mr. Jackson.

STELLA [*shaking hands with defiant cordiality*]. Good-bye. Give my love to Violet.

[EUSTACE *opens the door for* LADY FARINGFORD *and her daughter, and follows them out politely to see them to their carriage. A moment later* HENRY *is seen crossing the lawn. He enters by the French window. He has some letters*

and other papers of a business character in his hand, which he puts down on writing-table. He takes off his hat, sits down, and begins to write a note. Presently EUSTACE *re-enters, but* HENRY *does not notice him as his back is turned to the door.*]

EUSTACE [*after contemplating his brother's back for a moment with a grim smile*]. Hullo, Henry. Where did you spring from?

HENRY [*turning in his chair at the sound of his voice*]. From the mill. I came across the lawn. We had a short cut made through the shrubbery and a gate put three years ago. It's quicker.

EUSTACE. One of *your* improvements, eh?

HENRY. Yes. [EUSTACE *laughs genially.*] You're amused?

EUSTACE. It's so like you having a path made so as to get to your work quicker.

HENRY [*briefly*]. Yes. I'm not an idler.

EUSTACE. Quite so. And *I* am, you mean?

HENRY [*shrugs*]. I didn't say so.

EUSTACE [*quite good-humoured*]. You wanted to spare my feelings, no doubt? Very thoughtful of you.

HENRY [*after a pause*]. Is the mater in?

EUSTACE. I believe not. [*Another pause.*] By the way, I've been borrowing some of your clothes. Not a bad fit, are they? It's lucky we're so much the same size.

HENRY [*grimly*]. Very!

EUSTACE. It's particularly lucky, as I've been entertaining visitors on behalf of the family.

HENRY [*frigidly*]. Indeed?

EUSTACE. Yes. One of them a very charming visitor.

HENRY [*not interested*]. Who was that?

EUSTACE. Miss Faringford.

HENRY [*startled*]. Stella?

EUSTACE. Yes. [*Easily.*] Very nice girl altogether. She was here quite a long time while I told her my adventures—or as much of them as I thought suitable. Then

unhappily her mother turned up. Rather an awful woman that!

HENRY [*annoyed*]. What did Stella come for?

EUSTACE [*chaffing him gently*]. Not to inquire after me, if that's what you mean. Miss Faringford came for a book Vi had lent her, "Hester's Escape." She's certainly a very pretty girl. And a nice one.

HENRY [*stiffly*]. I may as well tell you I intend to marry Stella Faringford.

EUSTACE. Indeed? [*Pause.*] Have you asked her yet?

HENRY [*snaps*]. No.

EUSTACE. Then I wouldn't be too sure if I were you. Perhaps she won't have you.

[*This suggestion is too much for* HENRY, *who rises sharply from his chair, gathering up his papers with a view to finishing his writing in another room. When he has got half-way to the door he suddenly recollects himself, and turns sharp round to his brother.*]

HENRY. Oh, by the way, how are you?

EUSTACE [*laughing*]. I'm all right, thanks.

HENRY [*irritably*]. How on earth did you come to be lying in the drive in that way last night?

EUSTACE [*airily*]. Exhaustion, my dear chap. Cold and exposure! Hunger! You know the kind of thing.

HENRY. Cold? Why, it's the height of summer.

EUSTACE [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Heat, then.

HENRY [*exasperated*]. But how did you manage to *get* there? That's what *I* want to know. You are supposed to be in Australia.

EUSTACE [*beginning to laugh*]. I'll tell you. Only you must promise not to give me away.

HENRY. Give you away?

EUSTACE. Yes. [*Pause. He plunges into his story.*] I was awfully hard up and awfully sick of finding jobs and

losing them, and at last I began to long for a proper dinner, properly served, and a decent suit of clothes. Like these. I thought of writing to the governor, but that would have been no good. He'd have sent me some good advice and the mater would have sent a fiver, and in a fortnight things would have been as bad as ever. At last I thought of a dramatic *coup*. The Prodigal's Return! The Fatted Calf! A father softened, a mother in tears! The virtuous elder brother scowling in the background! So I came here. Back to the Old Home, you know. At the front door I selected a convenient spot and lay down in an elaborate faint. Excuse the pun. I chose the moment just after the Faringfords' carriage had gone. I knew the footman would have to come in after shutting the gate, and I intended to kick his leg and groan in an impressive manner. Anything to attract attention. Fortunately, the moon came out just at the right moment, so the fool couldn't help spotting me. He called Baines, who recognised me in a moment. They were very sympathetic. I expect they thought I was drunk. The lower classes are always sympathetic to intoxication. I was borne into the drawing-room, the wandering sheep returned to the fold, the exile home again. Tableau! Most pathetic!

HENRY [*disgusted*]. And so you *walked* all the way from London to Chedleigh in order to play off a heartless practical joke.

EUSTACE. Walked? Nonsense. I came by train.

HENRY. But you told Vi you walked.

EUSTACE. I said I *started* to walk. I only got as far as the station.

HENRY [*angrily*]. It was unpardonable. The mater was awfully upset. So was the governor.

EUSTACE. That was the idea. There's nothing like a sudden shock to bring out anyone's real feelings. The governor had no idea how fond he was of me until he saw me apparently dead, and unlikely to give him further trouble.

And by the time I came round he'd forgotten the cause of his sudden affection—or perhaps he's never realised it—and was genuinely glad to see me. Psychologically, it was most interesting.

HENRY. It was extremely undignified and quite unnecessary. If you had simply come up to the front door and rung the bell you would have been received just as readily.

EUSTACE. I doubt it. In fact, I doubt if I should have been received at all. I might possibly have been given a bed for the night, but only on the distinct understanding that I left early the next morning. Whereas now nobody talks of my going. A poor invalid! In the doctor's hands! Perfect quiet essential. No. My plan was best.

HENRY. Why didn't that fool Glaisher see through you?

EUSTACE. Doctors never see through their patients. It's not what they're paid for, and it's contrary to professional etiquette.

[HENRY *snorts wrathfully.*]

Besides, Glaisher's an ass, I'm glad to say.

HENRY [*fuming*]. It would serve you right if I told the governor the whole story.

EUSTACE. I dare say. But you won't. It wouldn't be cricket. Besides, I only told you on condition you kept it to yourself.

HENRY [*indignant*]. And so *I'm* to be made a partner in *your* fraud. The thing's a swindle, and I've got to take a share in it.

EUSTACE. Swindle? Not a bit. You've lent a hand—without intending it—to reuniting a happy family circle. Smoothed the way for the Prodigal's return. A very beautiful trait in your character.

HENRY [*grumpy*]. What I don't understand is *why* you told me all this. Why in Heaven's name didn't you keep the whole discreditable story to yourself?

EUSTACE [*with flattering candour*]. The fact is, I was

pretty sure *you'd* find me out. The governor's a perfect owl, but you've got brains—of a kind. You can see a thing when it's straight before your nose. So I thought I'd let you into the secret from the start, just to keep your mouth shut.

HENRY. Tck! [*Thinks for a moment.*] And what are you going to do now you *are* at home?

EUSTACE [*airily*]. *Do*, my dear chap? Why, nothing.

[*And on the spectacle of* EUSTACE'S *smiling self-assurance and* HENRY'S *outraged moral sense, the curtain falls.*]

ACT III

SCENE.—*The Lawn at Chedleigh Court. Ten days have passed since Act II. It is a Saturday, and the time is after luncheon. On the left stands the house, its French windows open on to the lawn. The lawn is bounded by a shrubbery, through which runs the path which* HENRY *had made three years previously to enable him to get to the mill quicker. When the curtain rises,* EUSTACE *is lying in a hammock, swinging lazily. He wears a new grey flannel suit, and looks exceedingly comfortable. Hard by, under a tree, are three or four wicker chairs, in one of which* HENRY *is sitting, reading the Market Report in "The Times." Eustace has a cup of coffee in his hand.* HENRY *has one on the table beside him. Presently* EUSTACE *drinks some, looking with indolent amusement at his brother absorbed in his newspaper.*

EUSTACE. Not bad coffee, this. [*Finishes it, and begins to perform the acrobatic feat of putting his cup and saucer on to the ground without falling out of the hammock.*]

HENRY [*looking up*]. I dare say. [*Drinks some.*] You'll drop that cup.

EUSTACE. I think not. [*Puts cup on to ground, and resumes his recumbent posture indolently.*]

HENRY. If you leave it there some one's sure to put his foot in it.

EUSTACE. I'll risk it.

HENRY. *Bah!*

[*Rises, and puts* EUSTACE'S *cup on table.*

EUSTACE. Thanks, my dear chap. Perhaps it *is* safer there.

[HENRY *grunts again and returns to his newspaper.* EUSTACE *gets cigarette out of pocket and lights it in a leisurely manner.*]

Anything exciting in the paper? Any convulsions in Wool?

HENRY [*snaps*]. No!

EUSTACE. Where's the governor? He generally comes home to luncheon on Saturdays, doesn't he?

HENRY. He's lunching at the Wilmingtons' with the mater. He'll be back soon. There's a meeting of his Election Committee at four.

EUSTACE. Where?

HENRY. Here.

EUSTACE. Will he get in?

HENRY. Faringford thinks so. But it'll be a close thing. A very little might turn the scale either way.

EUSTACE. Cost him a good deal, I suppose?

HENRY. Pretty well.

EUSTACE. *Panem et Circenses*, bread and circuses. That's the Tory prescription, isn't it? Particularly circuses.

HENRY. I dare say.

Enter BAINES.

BAINES. Dr. Glaisher to see you, sir.

[THE DOCTOR *comes out of the house and advances briskly to his patient.* BAINES *collects coffee cups and exit.*]

EUSTACE [*stretching out hand from hammock*]. How do you do, Doctor? I'm following your prescription, you see. Rest! Rest! There's nothing like it.

DR. GLAISHER [*with a sagacious nod*]. Just so. I really came for your father's committee. I thought it was to be at three o'clock. But your man tells me it's not till four. So I thought I'd take a look at my patient. Well, and how are we to-day?

[*During this scene* HENRY *almost chokes with indignation.* EUSTACE *enjoys himself immensely.*]

EUSTACE. Going on all right, thanks. Still a little limp perhaps.

DR. GLAISHER. Just so. The temperature normal? No fever? That's right. [*Feels pulse.*] Pulse quite regular? Now the tongue. Just so. As I should have expected. *Just* as I should have expected. Appetite still good?

EUSTACE. Excellent, thanks.

DR. GLAISHER. You're still taking your glass of port at eleven? Just so. Oh, you'll be soon all right.

EUSTACE. Thanks to *you*, Doctor.

DR. GLAISHER. Not at all. *Not* at all. [*To* HENRY.] He'll soon be himself again now. System still wants *tone* a little, wants *tone*. I'll send him round some more of that mixture. Otherwise he's all right. [HENRY *grunts.*

EUSTACE. And you'll look in again in a day or two just to see how I am, won't you, Doctor?

DR. GLAISHER. Certainly, if you wish it. And now I must be off. I have a couple of patients near here whom I can see in the next half-hour and be back again by four. Good-bye. Good-bye. Don't disturb yourself, pray.

[*To* HENRY, *who pays not the smallest attention to him.* THE DOCTOR *fusses off into the house.*]

HENRY [*savagely*]. Ass!

EUSTACE. My dear chap!

HENRY. Old Glaisher is a perfect noodle.

EUSTACE. Naturally. How much does a little country doctor make hereabouts? Four hundred a year? Say four hundred and fifty. You can't expect a first-rate intellect for that. 'Tisn't the market rate.

HENRY. I don't expect an absolute idiot.

EUSTACE. Glaisher doesn't *know* anything, of course, but his manner's magnificently impressive. After he's talked to me for five minutes, felt my pulse, and looked at my tongue, I almost begin to wonder whether I'm not really ill after all. That's a great gift for a doctor!

HENRY. You're perfectly well. Any fool can see that merely by looking at you. And old Glaisher goes on with his mixture and his glass of port at eleven. Bah! [EUSTACE *laughs.*] And you encourage him. How many visits has he paid you?

EUSTACE. I don't know. Seven or eight.

HENRY. And every one of them completely unnecessary.

EUSTACE. Completely unnecessary for me, but very useful to old Glaisher, considering they mean half a guinea a piece to him.

HENRY. Which the governor pays.

EUSTACE. Which the governor pays, as you say. That's why I do it. Somebody must keep old Glaisher going, or what would become of all the little Glaishers? Here's the governor, with piles of money to throw away on Parliamentary elections and similar tomfoolery. Why shouldn't I divert some of it to old Glaisher. I like the little man.

HENRY. You're awfully generous—with other people's money.

EUSTACE. I am. Whose money are *you* generous with?

[HENRY *snorts with disapproval. Further discussion, however, is prevented by the appearance of* MR. *and* MRS. JACKSON, *who come out of the house at this moment. They are in their best apparel, having just returned from their luncheon party.*]

EUSTACE. Morning, father. I've not seen you before to-day. You went out before I got down.

MR. JACKSON [*gruffly, sitting down*]. Good morning.

EUSTACE. Morning, mummy.

[MRS. JACKSON *kisses him affectionately, then seats herself in one of the chairs. He turns to his father again.*]

By the way, you've just missed one of your Election Committee.

MR. JACKSON [*alarmed*]. Not Sir John? [*Consults watch.*] It's only half-past three.

EUSTACE. No—only little Glaisher. He said he was too early. However, as *you* weren't there he came and had a look at *me*.

MRS. JACKSON. What did he say, dear?

EUSTACE. Said I was getting on all right. He's coming to have another look at me in a day or two.

MR. JACKSON. When does he think you'll be well enough to get to work again?

EUSTACE. I don't know. I didn't ask him.

MRS. JACKSON. Oh, Samuel, it's too soon to think of that *yet!* The poor boy's only convalescent. Wait till Dr. Glaisher has stopped his visits.

[HENRY *snorts.*]

EUSTACE. My dear Henry, what extraordinary noises you make. It's a terrible habit. You should see some one about it. Why not consult Glaisher?

MR. JACKSON [*to his wife*]. As you please, dear. Still, I *should* like to know what Eustace intends to do when he *is* well enough. I'm bound to say he *looks* perfectly well.

EUSTACE [*blandly*]. Appearances are so deceptive, father.

[VIOLET *comes out of house and goes up to her mother. She has some work in her hands.*]

VIOLET. Got back, mother dear? [*Kisses her.*] Enjoyed your lunch?

MRS. JACKSON. Very much. It was quite a large party.

VIOLET [*sitting down*]. What did you talk about?

MRS. JACKSON. About your father's election principally. They say Parliament may dissolve any day now. What are you making, dear?

VIOLET. Handkerchiefs. I promised Eustace I'd work some initials for him.

MR. JACKSON [*returning doggedly to his subject*]. Perhaps

you will be good enough to tell me what your plans are, Eustace.

EUSTACE. I haven't any plans, father.

MR. JACKSON. You haven't any?

MRS. JACKSON. Eustace said the other day he thought he would like to be a doctor.

MR. JACKSON. A doctor! Nonsense.

MRS. JACKSON [*mildly*]. Well, I only tell you what he said.

EUSTACE [*blandly*]. My remark was not intended to be taken literally. I don't seriously propose to enter the medical profession.

MR. JACKSON [*irritably*]. Do you seriously propose anything?

EUSTACE. No, father. I don't know that I do.

MR. JACKSON [*meditatively*]. I might perhaps find you a place in the office.

HENRY [*firmly*]. No, father! *I* object to that.

VIOLET. Henry!

HENRY. Yes, I do. I object to the office being used as a dumping-ground for incompetents.

MRS. JACKSON [*protesting*]. Henry! Your own brother!

HENRY. I can't help that. I don't see why the firm should be expected to pay a salary to some one who is utterly useless merely because he's my brother.

MR. JACKSON. Still, we might *try* him.

HENRY. My dear father, why not face the truth? You know what Eustace is. We got him into Jenkins' office. He made nothing of it. Then he was in the Gloucester and Wiltshire Bank. No use there. He tried farming. Same result. Finally you gave him a thousand pounds to settle in Australia. That was five years ago, and here he is back again without a sixpence.

MRS. JACKSON. Eustace has been very unlucky.

HENRY [*impatiently*]. What has *luck* got to do with it?

Eustace doesn't *work*. That's what's the matter with *him*.

Mrs. Jackson. Still, if he had another chance——

Henry. My dear mother, you always believe people ought to have another chance. It's a little mania with you. Eustace has had dozens of chances. He's made a mess of every one of them. You know that as well as I do.

Mr. Jackson. Yes. There's no use hiding it from ourselves.

Henry. Not the least—as we can't hide it from anyone else.

Mr. Jackson [*after a pause*]. Well, Eustace, what do *you* think?

Eustace [*airily*]. I? Oh, I agree with Henry.

[*Lights another cigarette.*

Mr. Jackson. You *what?*

Eustace. I agree with Henry. I think he's diagnosed the case with great accuracy. Henry ought to have been a doctor, too!

Mr. Jackson [*getting up angrily and making an oration*]. Now look here, Eustace. I've had enough of this. You seem to imagine because you've been ill, and come home in rags, nothing more in the way of work is to be expected of you. You're to loll about in a hammock smoking cigarettes, and taking not the smallest interest in any plans that are suggested for your future. Henry says the reason you've always been a failure is that you don't work, and you say you agree with him. Very well. What I have to tell you is I'm not going to have you loafing away your time here. I disapprove of loafing on principle. Both as a public man and as a private man I disapprove of it. There's far too much of it in England to-day. That's where the Germans are ahead of us. Young men who ought to be at business or in the professions idle away their time and live on their parents. That won't do for *me*. I insist upon your getting something to do at once and doing it. I insist upon it. If you don't——

[*During the last sentence of this impassioned oration,* Sir John *and* Lady Faringford *and* Stella *come out of the house, preceded by* Baines.]

Baines. Sir John and Lady Faringford, Miss Faringford.

[*Instant change of front on the part of the whole family.* Mr. Jackson, *who has been haranguing his son almost as though he were at a public meeting, stops short in the midst of his peroration, and hurriedly substitutes a glassy smile for the irascible sternness which marked his features a moment before.* Mrs. Jackson *and the others, who had listened in uncomfortable silence to* Mr. Jackson's *eloquence, hastily assume the conventional simper of politeness as they rise to receive their guests. The only person who remains quite self-possessed is* Eustace, *who smiles sardonically as he gets out of his hammock.*]

Eustace [*aside to* Henry]. Poor old governor! Stemmed in full tide!

Mrs. Jackson. Dear Lady Faringford. How nice of you to come! Stella, my dear.

[*Shakes hands with them and with* Sir John.

Lady Faringford. As Sir John was due at your husband's Committee at four, Stella and I thought we would drive him down.

Mrs. Jackson. You'll stay and have some tea now you are here, of course?

Lady Faringford. Thank you. Tea would be very pleasant.

Stella [*shaking hands with* Henry]. How do you do? And how is the invalid? [*Throwing a bright smile to* Eustace.] Getting on well?

Henry [*grimly*]. Excellently.

Stella. That's right.

[*Shakes hands with* Eustace. *To* Henry.]

He really looks better, doesn't he? Dr. Glaisher says it's been a wonderful recovery.

HENRY. I suppose he does!

STELLA [*to* MR. JACKSON]. How glad you must be to have him home again.

MR. JACKSON [*with ghastly attempt at effusion*]. It's a great pleasure, of course.

STELLA. It must be so sad for parents when their children go away from them. But I suppose sons *will* go away sometimes, however hard their parents try to keep them. Won't they?

MR. JACKSON. That does happen sometimes—er—unquestionably. [*More briskly.*] And, anyhow, young men can't stay at home always, my dear Miss Faringford. They have their own way to make in the world.

STELLA. And so the parents *have* to let them go. It seems hard. But when they come back it must be delightful.

EUSTACE. *It is.*

[*During the following scene* HENRY *makes one or two unsuccessful efforts to approach* STELLA, *but* EUSTACE *blandly outmanœuvres him, and secures her for himself. They chat together in the friendliest fashion, while* HENRY *fumes inwardly.*]

SIR JOHN. Hadn't we better be going in, Jackson? I shan't be able to stay very long. I have to meet my agent at 5.15 sharp to see about some fences.

MR. JACKSON [*looks at watch*]. It's barely four yet. We'd better wait a minute or two. Glaisher will arrive directly, and then we can get to work.

SIR JOHN. Ling's advertised to speak at Maytree, I see, to-morrow week.

MR. JACKSON. Is he? At Maytree? That's rather out of his country.

SIR JOHN. Yes. He doesn't go down so well in the

villages. Thank Heaven, agriculture is still conservative. They go to his meetings, though.

STELLA [*throwing a remark to* MR. JACKSON]. Mr. Ling is such a good speaker, they say.

EUSTACE. My father is a good speaker, too, when he's roused, Miss Faringford. You should have heard him ten minutes ago.

SIR JOHN. What was he speaking on?

EUSTACE [*airily*]. The Unemployed.

[MR. JACKSON *nearly explodes at this, but, remembering that visitors are present, controls himself by a great effort.*]

SIR JOHN. I congratulate you, Jackson. It isn't all sons who are so appreciative of their father's efforts. *My* son never listens to *me!*

[MR. JACKSON *smiles wanly.*]

Enter BAINES *announcing* DR. GLAISHER *and exit.*

[DR. GLAISHER *issues from house, and steps briskly on to the lawn, with a resolute pretence that time is money to him—although he knows it isn't.*]

MR. JACKSON. Ah, here you are, Doctor. I began to think you weren't coming.

MRS. JACKSON [*shaking hands*]. Good afternoon. Why didn't you bring Mrs. Glaisher? She and I and Lady Faringford could have entertained each other while you were all at your Committee.

DR. GLAISHER. She would have enjoyed it of all things. But I left her at home with the children. Tommy has the whooping-cough just now, and requires a lot of nursing.

MRS. JACKSON. Poor little chap. I hope he'll be better soon.

MR. JACKSON [*looking at watch*]. Well, well, I'm afraid we ought to go in. Come, Sir John. Are you ready, Doctor? Shall I lead the way? Come, Henry.

[*Fusses off importantly.*

SIR JOHN. By all means.

MRS. JACKSON [*calling after him*]. As you are going would you mind ringing the bell, Samuel, and telling Baines to bring tea out here?

MR. JACKSON. Very well, my dear.

[MR. JACKSON, SIR JOHN, THE DOCTOR, *and* HENRY *go off into the house to their Committee.* MRS. JACKSON, LADY FARINGFORD, *and* VIOLET *seat themselves by the table, to which tea is presently brought by* BAINES *and the* FOOTMAN. STELLA *selects a chair rather further off, where she is soon joined by* EUSTACE.]

LADY FARINGFORD. I do hope your husband will be elected, Mrs. Jackson. Mr. Ling has the most dreadful opinions about land—and, indeed, about everything else, I'm told. But that is of less importance.

MRS. JACKSON. Indeed?

LADY FARINGFORD. Oh yes. Only a year ago, at a meeting of the Parish Council, he made a speech attacking Sir John quite violently about one of his cottages. It was let to young Barrett, quite a respectable, hard-working man —who afterwards died of pneumonia. Mr. Ling declared the cottage was damp, and not fit for anyone to live in. So ridiculous of him! As if *all* cottages were not damp. The absurd part of it was that afterwards, when Mrs. Barrett was left a widow and Sir John gave her notice because she couldn't pay her rent, and he wanted to convert the cottage into pigsties, Mr. Ling was equally indignant, and seemed to think we ought to find Mrs. Barrett another house! I don't think he can be quite right in his head.

VIOLET. Shall I make the tea, mother?

MRS. JACKSON. If you please, dear.

[VIOLET *gives her mother and* LADY FARINGFORD *their tea.* EUSTACE *takes a cup to* STELLA.]

EUSTACE. What do *you* think about damp cottages, Miss

Faringford? Do you think they ought to be left standing in order that the labourer may live in them—and have pneumonia. Or be pulled down in order that the labourer may have nowhere to live at all?

STELLA. I don't know. I think it's dreadful there should be damp cottages anywhere.

EUSTACE. That would never do. There must be good cottages and bad cottages, in order that the strong may get the good cottages and the weak the bad.

STELLA. You mean in order that the strong may have the bad cottages and the weak the good. They need them more.

EUSTACE. That would be quite unscientific. No, the strong must have the good cottages in order that they may grow stronger. And the weak must have the bad cottages in order that they may die off. Survival of the fittest, you know.

STELLA. How horrible!

EUSTACE. Yes, but how necessary!

LADY FARINGFORD [*noticing that* EUSTACE *has drawn up a chair and seated himself by her daughter*]. Come over here, Stella. You have the sun on your face there.

STELLA [*rising unwillingly*]. Very well, mamma. [*Moves to a chair on the other side of the tea-table less unfortunately situated.*]

LADY FARINGFORD. By the way, Mrs. Jackson, have you heard about poor Miss Higgs, who used to keep the school at Little Chedleigh and play the harmonium so badly on Sundays? You remember her? Quite a good creature, knew all kinds of subjects, and never expected one to take any notice of her. So, of course, one never did. Well, two years ago an aunt died and left her a little money, and Miss Higgs retired and went to live in Gloucester. One of those unattractive houses near the canal. But she seems to have been quite incapable of managing money. Put it into a gold-mine, I believe, or gave it to her solicitor to

invest—which comes to the same thing—and lost every penny.

MRS. JACKSON. Oh! *Poor* Miss Higgs. What a sad thing.

LADY FARINGFORD. Fortunately, she was so affected by her loss that she drowned herself in the canal at the bottom of her garden. Otherwise I'm afraid some sort of a subscription would have had to be got up for her.

[EUSTACE *gets another cup of tea from* VIOLET, *and takes advantage of the move to sit down by* STELLA *again.* LADY FARINGFORD *notices this manœuvre with hardly concealed irritation, and, from this point till she rises to go, watches* EUSTACE'S *attentions to her daughter resentfully out of the corner of her eye.*]

VIOLET. I liked Miss Higgs very much, Lady Faringford.

LADY FARINGFORD. So did quite a number of people, I'm told. She was quite a good creature, as I said, much superior to the young woman who has succeeded her at Little Chedleigh. I wanted them to give the place to my maid Dawkins, who is getting rather past her work, and really could have taught everything that is necessary or wholesome for the lower orders to learn, though I dare say she might have had some difficulty with the harmonium —at first. However, they preferred to get down a young person from London with the most elaborate qualifications. So highly educated, in fact, that I hear she can't *teach* at all.

MRS. JACKSON. How very awkward.

LADY FARINGFORD. It is indeed.

[*Swift glance towards* EUSTACE *and her daughter, who are obviously far too much interested in one another.*]

Stella!

STELLA. Yes, mamma.

LADY FARINGFORD. Say good-bye to Mrs. Jackson, my dear. We really must be going. [*Rising.*

MRS. JACKSON [*rising also*]. Shall I let Sir John know you are ready?

LADY FARINGFORD. Pray don't trouble. We can pick him up as we go through the house. Good-bye, Mrs. Jackson. [*To* EUSTACE, *shaking hands.*] Good-bye. When do you go back to Australia? *Quite* soon, I hope. Come, Stella.

STELLA [*shaking hands*]. Good-bye, Mr. Jackson.

[LADY FARINGFORD *and* STELLA *take their departure through the French windows, accompanied by* VIOLET. *Their tea has been sadly curtailed, and so has the meeting of* SIR JOHN'S *Committee, but* LADY FARINGFORD *feels that no sacrifices are too great to nip an incipient flirtation between her daughter and* EUSTACE. *As soon as they have gone,* EUSTACE *goes and sits by his mother.*]

EUSTACE. Clever woman, that.

MRS. JACKSON. Is she, dear? I hadn't noticed.

EUSTACE. Yes. We're all of us selfish. But most of us make an effort to conceal the fact. With the result that we are always being asked to do something for somebody and having to invent elaborate excuses for not doing it. And that makes us very unpopular. For every one hates asking for anything—unless he gets it. But Lady Faringford proclaims her selfishness so openly that no one ever dreams of asking her to do things. It would be tempting Providence. With the result that I expect she's quite a popular woman.

MRS. JACKSON. I'm glad you like Lady Faringford, dear. Your father has the highest opinion of her.

EUSTACE. Yes. The governor never could see an inch before his nose.

MRS. JACKSON. Can't he, dear? He has never said anything about it.

EUSTACE [*patting her hand affectionately*]. Dear mother !

[VIOLET *returns.*]

Seen the Gorgon safely off the premises ?

VIOLET [*laughing*]. Yes—and Sir John.

MRS. JACKSON. The Committee was over, then ?

VIOLET. It is now—as Lady Faringford insisted on carrying off the chairman. Here is father.

[MR. JACKSON *and* HENRY *come out of house.* BAINES *follows hard after them, with letters on salver. He hands three of these to* MR. JACKSON, *two to* MRS. JACKSON, *and one to* VIOLET.]

BAINES. Shall I take away, madam ?

MRS. JACKSON. Wait a moment. [*To* MR. JACKSON.] Will you have any tea, Samuel ?

MR. JACKSON [*opening long envelope and reading contents*]. No. We had some indoors.

MRS. JACKSON [*to* BAINES]. Yes, you can take away. [*To* MR. JACKSON.] Did you have a successful meeting ?

[BAINES *beckons to* FOOTMAN, *who comes out, and together they take away tea.*]

MR. JACKSON [*standing by table, still reading*]. Eh ? Oh yes.

MRS. JACKSON [*to* HENRY]. What a pity Sir John had to go.

HENRY. It didn't matter. We'd pretty nearly got through our business.

[MRS. JACKSON *opens her letter, and becomes absorbed in its contents.*]

MR. JACKSON [*handing papers to* HENRY]. You'd better look through these. They're from Fisher and Thompson. It's about Wenhams' mill. The sale is next week.

HENRY [*nods*]. Very well.

MR. JACKSON [*taking a seat at the table, and clearing his throat with dignity*]. Now, Eustace, I want to have a serious talk with you.

EUSTACE. Not *again*, father.

MR. JACKSON [*puzzled*]. What do you mean?

EUSTACE. Couldn't you put it off till to-morrow? I'm hardly well enough to talk seriously twice in one day.

MR. JACKSON. Nonsense, sir. You're perfectly well. Glaisher says there's no longer the slightest cause for anxiety.

EUSTACE. The traitor!

MR. JACKSON. What, sir?

EUSTACE. Nothing, father.

MR. JACKSON. As I told you before tea, I'm not going to have you idling away your time here. The question is, what are we to do?

EUSTACE. Just so, father.

MR. JACKSON. I mean, what are *you* to do?

[*Pause. No remark from* EUSTACE.]

Lady Faringford said as she went away you ought to go back to Australia. She said it was a thousand pities for any young man *not* to go to Australia.

MRS. JACKSON. Eustace was just saying how clever Lady Faringford was when you came out.

MR. JACKSON. I'm glad to hear it. [*To* EUSTACE.] Well, what do you think?

EUSTACE. About Australia?

MR. JACKSON. Yes.

EUSTACE. I don't think anything about it.

MR. JACKSON. Would you like to go out there again?

EUSTACE. No, I shouldn't. I've been there once. It was an utter failure.

MR. JACKSON. *You* were a failure, you mean.

EUSTACE. As you please. Anyway, it was no good,

and I had to work as a navvy on the railway. I don't propose to do that again.

HENRY [*looking up from* FISHER *and* THOMPSON'S *papers*]. Other people do well in Australia.

EUSTACE. Other people do well in England. Or rather, the same people do well in both.

MR. JACKSON [*peevishly*]. What *do* you mean?

EUSTACE. Simply that the kind of qualities which make for success in one country make for success in another. It's just as easy to fail in Sydney as in London. I've done it and I know.

MRS. JACKSON [*who has just opened her second letter*]. A letter from Janet. She's going to be at Gloucester next week, and would like to come over and see us on Friday. We aren't going out on that day, are we, Vi?

[MR. JACKSON, *impatient at this interruption, opens the second of his letters and glances at it.*]

VIOLET. No, mother.

MRS. JACKSON. That will do, then. She'd better come to luncheon. [*Rises.*] I'll write and tell her at once before I forget.

VIOLET. Shall I do it, mother?

MRS. JACKSON. No, dear. I can manage it.

[*Goes into house.*

MR. JACKSON [*who has opened his third letter, and contemplated its contents with indignant amazement, strikes the table with his open hand*]. Well!

VIOLET. What is it, father?

MR. JACKSON. What's the meaning of this, I wonder! Barton must be out of his senses.

VIOLET. Barton?

MR. JACKSON. Yes, Barton. The tailor. Why does he send me in a bill like this? Twenty-five pounds! And I've had nothing from him since Easter. Listen to this. One lounge suit four guineas, one dress suit eight

guineas, one flannel suit three pounds ten, another lounge suit four guineas, one frock coat and waistcoat four guineas, one pair of trousers one guinea. Total, twenty-five pounds eleven.

EUSTACE [*whose energies are absorbed at the moment in blowing through a cigarette-holder*]. They're mine, father.

MR. JACKSON. What, sir !

EUSTACE [*calmly*]. Some clothes I ordered. I told him to send the bill to you. That's all right, isn't it ?

MR. JACKSON [*exploding*]. All right ! Certainly not, sir. It's very far from right. It's a great liberty.

EUSTACE. My dear father, the bill must be sent in to somebody.

MR. JACKSON. And why not to you, pray ?

EUSTACE. What would be the good of that, father. I've nothing to pay it with.

MR. JACKSON. Then you shouldn't have ordered the things.

EUSTACE. But I must wear something. I can't go on wearing Henry's things indefinitely. It's hard on *him !*

[HENRY *snorts.*]

My dear Henry !

MR. JACKSON [*gobbling with indignation*]. But what's become of all the clothes you had ? You must have had *some* clothes.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. They're in London—and in rags.

MR. JACKSON. Now look here, Eustace. I'm not going to have this. I'm not going to have a son of mine running up bills here.

EUSTACE. All right, father. I'm quite willing to pay for the things—if you give me the money.

MR. JACKSON. I shall *not* give you the money, sir. If you want money you must earn it.

EUSTACE. That doesn't take us very far.

[*At this* MR. JACKSON *rises and invokes the heavens.*]

MR. JACKSON. You'll disgrace me. That's what will happen. I insist on your paying Barton, and giving me your word of honour never to get anything on credit here again.

[*Thrusts bill into* EUSTACE's *hand and tramps about angrily.*]

EUSTACE. I've no objection. I don't run up tailors' bills for pleasure. I'd just as soon pay ready money as you would. Only I haven't got it. Give me twenty pounds —no, twenty-five pounds eleven—and I'll pay Barton to-morrow.

MR. JACKSON. I decline to give you money. I decline. Your request is impudent.

EUSTACE [*blandly*]. Let's keep our tempers, father.

MR. JACKSON. *What*, sir ?

EUSTACE. I merely suggested we should keep our tempers. That's all.

MR. JACKSON. This is intolerable. I disown you, sir. I disown you.

VIOLET. Father !

MR. JACKSON. Be silent, Violet. [*To* EUSTACE.] I'll have nothing more to do with you. I'll pay this debt to Barton—and any others you may have incurred since you came back. After that I've done with you. Leave my house at once.

EUSTACE [*rising, and throwing away his cigarette. He has his temper admirably under control, but speaks with ominous distinctness*]. Very well, father. I'll go if you wish it. But I warn you if I do go it will be to the nearest workhouse !

MR. JACKSON [*fuming*]. That's your affair. It has nothing to do with me. [*Turns away.*

EUSTACE. I question that. It rather knocks your election prospects on the head, I fancy.

MR. JACKSON [*swinging round*]. Eh ? What ?

EUSTACE. You don't seriously suppose if I do this you'll be returned for Parliament? If you do, you don't know the British Electorate. This is going to be a scandal, a scandal worth five hundred votes to the other side. And the last man's majority was only fifty. Oh no, my dear father, if it comes out that the son of the rich Conservative candidate is in the local workhouse, good-bye to your chances in *this* constituency.

HENRY. You wouldn't dare!

EUSTACE. Dare? Nonsense. What have I to lose?

HENRY. But this is infamous. It's blackmail.

EUSTACE [*contemptuously*]. Call it what you like. It's what I propose to do if you force me to it.

VIOLET. Eustace! You couldn't be so wicked!

EUSTACE [*more gently*]. My dear Vi, have I any choice? Here am I absolutely penniless. The governor flies into a rage because I order some clothes from his tailor, and turns me into the street. What am I to do? I've no profession, no business I can turn my hand to. I might take to manual labour, I suppose, break stones on the road. But that would bring equal discredit on this highly respectable family. In England sons of wealthy cloth manufacturers don't work with their hands. Besides, I don't like work. So there's nothing left but to beg. If I beg in the street the police will take me up. Therefore I must beg from my relations. If they refuse me I must go on the Parish.

HENRY. Father, this is monstrous. I wouldn't submit to it if I were you. If he wants to prevent your election let him. I advise you to refuse.

EUSTACE. All right. But it knocks *your* prospects on the head, too, my dear Henry—social advancement and love's young dream, you know. Miss Faringford won't marry you if this happens. Her mother won't let her. You're not so rich as all that. And if her mother would, Stella wouldn't. Stella rather likes me. In fact, I think she likes me better than she does you at present. I'm

not absolutely certain she wouldn't marry me if I asked her.

HENRY. Lady Faringford would forbid her.

EUSTACE. Perhaps we shouldn't consult her. Anyhow, if you leave me to eat skilly in Chedleigh Workhouse, Stella won't accept you. I lay you ten to one on it.

[HENRY *opens his mouth to speak, realises that he has nothing to say, and shuts it again. All silent. Then a gong rings loudly inside the house. Another pause.*]

Well, father, what do you say?

[*Another silence.* MR. JACKSON, *nonplussed, turns away.*]

Nothing? *You*, Henry. *You're* full of resource! What do *you* think?

[*But* HENRY *apparently is equally at a loss, for he says nothing. Another pause.* EUSTACE *shrugs his shoulders.*]

Well, first gong's gone. I shall go and dress for dinner.

[*Lounges off into the house as the curtain falls.*

ACT IV

SCENE.—*The drawing-room at Chedleigh as we saw it in the first Act. Some three hours have elapsed since* EUSTACE *exploded his bomb-shell. When the curtain rises,* MRS. JACKSON *is sitting in an easy chair, nodding over a piece of work of some kind.* VIOLET *is at the piano, playing softly. Presently* EUSTACE *wanders in.* VIOLET *stops playing, closes piano, and comes down towards fireplace, later taking up handkerchief she is working for* EUSTACE.

MRS. JACKSON [*waking up, drowsily*]. Is that you, Eustace? Where's your father?

EUSTACE [*going to her*]. In the library with Henry.

MRS. JACKSON. Talking business?

EUSTACE [*nods*]. Yes.

MRS. JACKSON. Can you see the time, Vi?

VIOLET [*sitting by fireplace*]. Nearly ten, mother dear.

MRS. JACKSON. So late! They must be discussing something very important.

EUSTACE [*grimly*]. They are.

MRS. JACKSON. Have they been long in the library?

EUSTACE. They went directly you and Vi left the table.

MRS. JACKSON. And you've been alone in the dining-room all that time? Why didn't you come in to us?

EUSTACE. I thought they might want to consult me.

MRS. JACKSON [*beaming*]. About business? I'm so glad. I'm sure you would be most useful in the business if you tried, though Henry doesn't think so.

EUSTACE. Are you, mother?

MRS. JACKSON. Of course. Why not? Henry is.

And you always learnt your lessons far quicker than Henry when you were a boy.

EUSTACE [*laying hand on her shoulder*]. Flatterer !

MRS. JACKSON [*putting work into work-basket*]. Well, I don't think I'll stay up any longer. [*Rises.*] And I do hope Henry won't keep your father up late. It can't be good for him. [*Kisses* EUSTACE.] Good-night, dear. Sleep well. Are you coming, Vi ? [*Kisses her.*

VIOLET. Directly, mother.

[EUSTACE *holds open door for his mother to go out. Then comes slowly down and sits in chair by* VIOLET.]

EUSTACE. Dear old mater. She's not clever, but for real goodness of heart I don't know her equal.

VIOLET [*impatiently*]. Clever ! I'm sick of cleverness. What's the good of it ? You're *clever*. What has it done for you ?

EUSTACE. Kept me out of prison. That's always something.

[VIOLET *makes gesture of protest.*]

Oh yes, it has. There have been times when I was so hard up I felt I would do anything, *anything*, just for a square meal. If I had been a stupid man I should have done it. I should have robbed a till or forged a cheque, and that would have been the end of me. Fortunately, I'd brains enough to realise that that kind of thing always gets found out. So here I am, still a blameless member of society.

[VIOLET *says nothing, but goes on working steadily. Pause.*]

The mater hasn't been told ?

VIOLET. About what happened before dinner. No.

EUSTACE. I'm glad of that.

VIOLET. Why ?

EUSTACE [*impatiently*]. My dear Vi, I'm not absolutely

inhuman. Because I'm fond of her, of course, and don't like giving her pain.

VIOLET. She'll have to know sooner or later.

EUSTACE. Then I'd rather it was later ; in fact, when I'm not here. If anybody has got to suffer on my account I'd rather not see it.

VIOLET. And you call Lady Faringford selfish !

EUSTACE [*carelessly*]. Yes. It's a quality I particularly dislike—in others.

VIOLET [*stopping her work for a moment and looking at him wonderingly*]. I can't understand you. As a boy you were so different. You were kind and affectionate and thoughtful for others.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. I dare say.

VIOLET. And now—— ! [*Earnestly.*] Think what you have made of your life ! You had good abilities. You might have done almost anything if you had only tried. You might have been a successful, honourable man, with an assured position and a record you could be proud of. You might——

EUSTACE [*putting his fingers in his ears*]. Stop, Vi ; stop, I tell you. I won't listen to you.

VIOLET [*surprised*]. Why not ?

EUSTACE [*doggedly*]. Because I won't. All that is over. What's past is past. I have to live my life *now*. Do you suppose it would make it any easier for me to grizzle over wasted opportunities ? No ! As each year passes I turn over the page and forget it.

VIOLET [*wondering*]. And do you never look back ?

EUSTACE [*with a slight shiver*]. Never ! If I did I should have drowned myself long ago.

VIOLET [*with horror*]. Eustace !

EUSTACE [*exasperated*]. Oh, my dear Vi, it's all very well for you to preach, but you don't understand. It's easy enough for you living comfortably here at home, working for your bazaars and visiting your old women. Your life

slips away in a quiet round of small duties, paying calls with the mater, pouring out the governor's coffee. One day just like another. You've no anxieties, no temptations. The lines have fallen to you in pleasant places. And you think you can sit in judgment on me!

VIOLET [*quietly, resuming her work*]. You think my life happier than yours, then?

EUSTACE. Isn't it?

VIOLET [*shaking her head*]. No. *Your* life is your own. You can do as you please with it, use it or waste it as you think best. You are free. I am not. You think because I stay quietly at home, doing the duty that lies nearest me and not crying out against fate, therefore I've nothing more to wish for. Would *you* be happy, do you suppose, if you were in my case? I live here down in Chedleigh from year's end to year's end. Mother never leaves home. She doesn't care to pay visits. So I cannot either. I may sometimes get away for a few days, a week, perhaps, but very seldom. And as mother grows older I shall go less. Soon people will give up asking me when they find I always refuse. And so I shall be left here alone with no friends, no real companionship, merely one of the family obliged to know the people they know, visit the people they visit, not a grown woman with interests of her own and a life to order as she pleases.

EUSTACE. But you'll marry?

VIOLET. Marry! What chance have I of marrying now? When we hadn't so much money, and Henry and father weren't so set on taking a position in the county, there was some chance for me. Now there is none. It's all very well for Henry. He is a partner in the firm. He will be a very rich man. He can marry Stella Faringford. Oh, we are to be great people! But you don't find Sir John Faringford's son proposing to *me!* No! He wants a girl of his own class or else an heiress, not a manufacturer's daughter with a few thousand pounds. So the great people

won't marry me and I mustn't marry the little people. Father wouldn't like it. He hardly lets mother ask them to the house nowadays. And so the years go by and my youth with them, and I know it will be like this always, always.

EUSTACE. Poor old Vi! And I thought you were quite contented with your bazaars and your old women. Why don't you speak to the mater?

VIOLET [*with a shrug that is half a sigh*]. What's the use? Mother wouldn't understand. She married when she was twenty-one. She doesn't know what it is for a girl to go on living at home long after she's grown up and ought to have a house of her own. So I stay on here knitting socks for old Allen and working *your* handkerchiefs, and here I shall stay till mother and father are both dead. . . . And then it will be too late.

EUSTACE. Poor old Vi! . . . [*A pause.*] Do you know, you make me feel rather mean? Henry and the governor I can stand up to. They're very much like me. We belong to the predatory type. Only they're more successful than I am. They live on their workpeople. I propose to live on them. We're birds of a feather. But you're different. I suppose you get it from the mater.

VIOLET. Why are you so bitter against your father?

EUSTACE. Am I?

VIOLET. Yes. Just now. And this afternoon.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. Oh, that—! Well, the fact is, I wanted to bring things to a head. I feel I can't stay here. I must get away.

VIOLET. Why?

EUSTACE. For lots of reasons. I can't stand this place. I've outgrown it, I suppose. [*Pause.*] And then there's Stella——

VIOLET. Stella?

EUSTACE. Yes. If I were here much longer I might be falling in love with Stella. And that wouldn't be fair

to Henry. After all, he was first in the field. And it wouldn't be fair to her either. I'm not fit to marry a girl like that. No. I must get away.

VIOLET [*touched*]. Poor Eustace.

EUSTACE. Oh, you needn't *pity* me. *I* shall get along somehow. My life hasn't been successful. It hasn't even been honourable. But it's been devilish interesting.

[*The door opens, and* MR. JACKSON *and* HENRY *enter.* MR. JACKSON *passes* EUSTACE *in dignified silence, and turns to his daughter.*]

MR. JACKSON. You here, Vi? I thought you'd have gone to bed. Your mother went long ago, I expect?

VIOLET. Only a few minutes.

MR. JACKSON. Well, run away now, dear. It's late.

VIOLET. Very well, father. [*Gathers up her things and rises.*] Good-night. [*Kisses him.*] Good-night, Henry. Good-night, Eustace.

EUSTACE [*taking her hand*]. Good-night, Vi. And good-bye.

[*He goes to the door and opens it for her. She kisses him and goes out. He closes the door after her and slowly turns back to the others, to find* MR. JACKSON *in a commanding position on the hearthrug, and* HENRY *standing by the piano.* EUSTACE *selects a settee at the opposite side of the room from his father, makes himself comfortable on it, and waits for one of the others to speak. Neither does so, however, and after a minute or more has elapsed,* EUSTACE, *feeling the silence to be rather grotesque, breaks it.*]

EUSTACE [*cheerfully*]. Well?

MR. JACKSON [*coughs nervously, then plunges into his subject*]. Ahem! We have been in consultation, your brother and I, as to the right course to adopt with regard to you.

EUSTACE [*nods*]. So I supposed.

[HENRY *finds a chair about equidistant from his father and his brother, and sits down.*]

MR. JACKSON [*with great dignity*]. After the extraordinary and—er—undutiful attitude you took up this afternoon, I might naturally have declined all further relations with you. But——

EUSTACE [*matter of fact*]. But as that course might prove almost as disagreeable for yourself as it would for me, you naturally thought better of it. Let's get on.

MR. JACKSON [*rearing under this touch of the spur, but mastering himself*]. I might point out to you that we, your mother and I, have never failed in our duty by you. We have been indulgent parents. You were sent to a first-rate school. Nothing was spared that could make you a prosperous and successful man. But I won't speak of that.

EUSTACE [*dryly*]. Thanks, father.

MR. JACKSON [*running on*]. I might point out that we have given you a score of good chances for establishing yourself in a satisfactory position, and you have failed to profit by them. I might remind you that since you returned to this roof——

EUSTACE [*impatiently*]. My dear father, I thought you were going to leave that part out? And I do wish you wouldn't begin talking about your *roof*. When people refer to their *roof* I always know they're going to suggest something quite unpractical. In ordinary times they don't soar above the ceiling. But in moments of fervour off goes the roof! Let's come to the point.

MR. JACKSON [*rearing again, but again controlling himself*]. I will do so at once. . . . Your brother and I feel that little as you have deserved this consideration at my hands, and wholly as you have forfeited all claim to further assistance both by your past failures and by your conduct this afternoon, you should yet be given one more chance.

[EUSTACE *insensibly begins to beat time to his father's impassioned antitheses.*]

EUSTACE. Come, that's satisfactory.

MR. JACKSON. Five years ago when, after repeated failures on your part, after paying your debts more than once and finding you openings again and again, I sent you to Australia, I gave you a thousand pounds to make a career for yourself. I told you that was the last sum of money you would have from me during my lifetime. What may—or may not—come to you after my death is another matter. And I gave it you on the express stipulation that if you lost or squandered it you were not to write for more.

EUSTACE. I kept that stipulation.

MR. JACKSON. That is so. I now propose to do again what I did five years ago. I propose to send you back to Australia with a thousand pounds.

HENRY [*looking up from book which he has been appearing to read*]. To be paid to you *after* your arrival there.

MR. JACKSON. Exactly. I will send the thousand pounds, less the cost of your passage, to an agent, to be paid to you on your landing. In return for this you are to promise not to come back to this country without my express permission.

[MR. JACKSON *pauses for a suitable expression of gratitude from his son. None, however, is forthcoming, and he has to go on without it.*]

I think you will agree with me that the course I am taking is a kinder one than you deserve. Few fathers would do as much. I might have named a smaller sum. But I prefer to err on the generous side.

EUSTACE [*nodding*]. Quite so. [*With genuine curiosity.*] And what do you propose that I should do with a thousand pounds?

MR. JACKSON. That is for you to decide. You might start in business.

EUSTACE. I've tried that.

MR. JACKSON. Sheep farming.

EUSTACE. I've tried that.

MR. JACKSON. Gold mining.

EUSTACE. I've tried that.

MR. JACKSON [*annoyed*]. Well, well, any line which you think offers you a favourable opening.

EUSTACE [*insinuatingly*]. And which line is that?

MR. JACKSON [*irritably*]. I don't know.

EUSTACE. No more do I. [*Pause.*] No, father, it would be absurd for me to accept your offer, because it isn't practical. It would only be throwing your money away. It would do me no good, and cause you heartfelt distress.

MR. JACKSON. Nonsense. Other young fellows go out to Australia with less than a thousand pounds and make *fortunes!* Far less! Why shouldn't you?

EUSTACE. Why, indeed? However, we must keep to the point. *They* make fortunes. *I* don't.

MR. JACKSON [*exasperated*]. In fact, they're active and energetic, you're useless and worthless. Where other people by thrift and enterprise and steady application *make* money, you only *lose* it.

EUSTACE. Exactly. I lose it. And doubtless for lack of the qualities you mention. What then? Granted I am all you say, how does that help us? Here I am, alive, and requiring food at the customary intervals. Who is going to give it me?

[HENRY *snorts.*]

Really, Henry!

MR. JACKSON [*hotly*]. That is to say you *want* to go through life sponging on your family instead of working for your living like an honest man!

EUSTACE [*very nearly losing his temper at what seems to him the amazing stupidity of this remark*]. Look here, father, hadn't we better drop all that stuff about *wanting* to sponge on one's family and the rest of it? Nobody *wants* to sponge

on other people. The idea's preposterous. We all *want* to be prosperous and highly respected members of Society like you and Henry, with more money than we know what to do with, with a seat in Parliament and a wife out of the Baronetage. That's what we *want*. And if we haven't the luck or the brains or the energy to get it, you needn't call us names. You don't suppose I *prefer* losing money to making it, do you? You don't suppose if I had my *choice* I should drift about the world adding up accounts in a filthy Hong-Kong bank or playing steward on a filthier ocean liner? You can't be so ridiculous. I'm good for nothing, as you say. I've no push, no initiative, no staying power. I shall never be anything but a failure. But don't imagine I *like* it! You seem to think you've a terrible grievance because I'm a ne'er-do-well and come to you for money, but the real grievance is mine.

HENRY. If you don't like coming on your family for money, you needn't do it.

EUSTACE [*impatiently*]. It's not what I do but what I am that is the difficulty. What does it matter what one *does?* It's done, and then it's over and one can forget it. The real tragedy is what one *is*. Because one can't escape from that. It's always there, the bundle of passions, weaknesses, stupidities, that one calls character, waiting to trip one up. Look at the governor, that pillar of rectitude and business ability!

[MR. JACKSON *hastily assumes a less commanding posture.*]

Do you suppose *he* could be like me if he tried? Of course not. Nor could I be like him.

MR. JACKSON. Have you no will?

EUSTACE. No. Have you? Have we any of us? Aren't we just the creatures of our upbringing, of circumstance, of our physical constitution? We are launched on the stream at our birth. Some of us can swim against the current. Those who can't it washes away.

[*There is a pause.* HENRY *looks sullen,* MR. JACKSON *puzzled.* EUSTACE, *who has grown rather heated, regains his composure.*]

MR. JACKSON [*with a sigh*]. Well, what's to be done with you?

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. I'm afraid you'll have to keep me. You're my father, you know. You've brought into the world a worthless and useless human being. I think those were *your* adjectives. You're responsible.

MR. JACKSON [*angry again*]. Is that any reason why I should support you?

EUSTACE [*quite sincerely*]. No, father. Frankly, I don't think it is. I think your sensible course would be to put me quietly out of this wicked world or hire some one else to do so. I'm a bad egg. I shall never hatch into anything that will do you the smallest credit. Your sensible course is to destroy me. But you daren't do that. Social convention won't allow you. The law would make a fuss. Indeed, the law won't even allow me to put an end to myself and save you the trouble. I should be rescued, very wet and draggled, from the muddy waters of the Ched by the solitary policeman who seems to have nothing else to do but to stand about rescuing people who had much better be left to drown. I should be haled before the magistrates—you're a magistrate yourself now, father. You'd be there—I should be given a solemn lecture and then "handed over to my friends"—that's you again, father—who would undertake to look after me in future. And I only hope you would be able to conceal your annoyance at my rescue from the prying eyes of your brother justices!

MR. JACKSON [*stung*]. You've no right to say that. You've no right to suggest that I wish you were dead.

EUSTACE [*genially*]. Of course you do. You want me to go to Australia, where you'll never hear of me again, where, in fact, I shall be dead to you. What's the difference?

[*A pause.*]

MR. JACKSON. Well, I won't argue with you. The question is, what do you propose?

EUSTACE [*as if it was the most natural suggestion in the world*]. In the circumstances, I think your wisest course will be to make me an allowance, say three hundred a year, paid quarterly. Then I'll go away and live quietly in London, and you'll be rid of me.

MR. JACKSON [*furious*]. I refuse, sir. I refuse absolutely. The suggestion is utterly shameless.

EUSTACE [*calmly*]. I dare say. But it's perfectly sensible. I appeal to Henry.

HENRY [*after a moment's thought*]. Father, I think you'd better do as he says. If you gave him a thousand pounds, as we intended, he'd only lose it. Better make him an allowance. Then you can always stop it if he doesn't behave himself. It's a shameless proposal, as you say, but it's practical.

EUSTACE. Bravo, Henry! I always said you had brains. That's it exactly. Shameless, but eminently practical.

MR. JACKSON [*grumbling*]. What I can't see is, *why* I should allow you this money. Here's Henry who's perfectly satisfactory, and has never caused me a moment's anxiety. I don't give *him* money. Whereas you, who have never caused me anything else, expect me to keep you for the remainder of your life.

EUSTACE [*with bitter contempt*]. It is unreasonable, isn't it? But we live in a humanitarian age. We coddle the sick and we keep alive the imbecile. We shall soon come to pensioning the idle and the dissolute. You're only a little in advance of the times. England is covered with hospitals for the incurably diseased and asylums for the incurably mad. If a tenth of the money were spent on putting such people out of the world, and the rest were used in preventing the healthy people from falling sick, and the sane people from starving, we should be a wholesomer nation.

MR. JACKSON [*after a pause*]. Well, if Henry thinks so I suppose I must give you an allowance—but I won't go beyond two hundred.

EUSTACE. I can't keep out of debt on two hundred.

MR. JACKSON. Two hundred and fifty, then.

EUSTACE [*persuasively*]. Three hundred.

MR. JACKSON. Two hundred and fifty. Not a penny more. [*Breaking out again.*] Why, I'd starve before I consented to sponge on my family as you are doing!

EUSTACE [*quietly*]. Ah! You evidently don't know much about starving, father!

[*Silence.* MR. JACKSON *suddenly realises that his son has actually known what hunger means, and the thought makes him uncomfortable.*]

If you write me a cheque for my first quarter now I can catch the 11.15 up.

MR. JACKSON [*almost gently*]. You can't go to-night. . . . You're not packed. . . . And you'll want to say good-bye to your mother.

EUSTACE. I think not. As I'm to go, it had better be as suddenly as I came. It saves such a lot of explanations. You can send my things after me to London.

MR. JACKSON [*sadly*]. Very well. I'll go and write you a cheque.

[MR. JACKSON *goes out with a heavy sigh, and silence falls upon the two brothers. At last* HENRY *speaks.*]

HENRY [*bitterly*]. Well, you've got what you wanted.

EUSTACE [*genially*]. Thanks to you, my dear fellow.

HENRY. And what a sordid plot it has been! To make your way into this house by a trick with the deliberate intention of blackmailing your own father.

EUSTACE [*remonstrating good-humouredly*]. You're wrong. The blackmail, as you call it, was an afterthought. When I made my way into this house—in the way you so accurately

describe—my designs went no further than getting some decent food and a house over my head for a few days. But when I got here and found you all so infernally prosperous, the governor flinging money about over getting into Parliament, you intending to marry Faringford's daughter, I thought I'd better put in for a share of the plunder.

HENRY [*disgusted*]. Well, you've succeeded—succeeded because you've neither honour nor conscience about you.

EUSTACE [*turning on him*]. No. I've succeeded because you're a snob and the governor's a snob, and that put you both in my power. I might have been as poor and as unscrupulous as you please without getting a halfpenny out of either of you. Luckily, the governor's political ambitions and your social ambitions gave me the pull over you, and I used it.

HENRY. Faugh! [*Turns away angrily, then faces his brother again.*] You understand, of course, that if you are to have this allowance it is on the express condition that you give up all thoughts of Miss Faringford, give them up absolutely.

EUSTACE [*carelessly*]. By all means. What should *I* be about marrying a penniless girl like Stella?

HENRY. There's nothing you won't do for money! Even to giving up the girl you pretend to care for.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. I dare say. Besides, what would Stella be about marrying a penniless devil like me?

HENRY [*exasperated at the injustice of the world*]. And the best of it is, if this story ever gets about, *you'll* get all the sympathy! Ne'er-do-wells always do. The governor and I would be despised as a couple of stony-hearted wretches with no bowels of compassion, who grudged money to a necessitous brother, while *you* would be called a light-hearted devil-may-care chap who is nobody's enemy but his own.

EUSTACE [*grimly*]. Well, I think I'd change places with you. After all, you're pretty comfortable here. And you'll marry Stella, damn you!

[Mr. Jackson *enters with a cheque in his hand, and* Henry *is silent.*]

Mr. Jackson [*holding out cheque to* Eustace]. Here's your cheque.

Eustace [*taking it and reading the amount prosaically*]. Fours into two hundred and fifty. £62 10*s.* 0*d.* Thanks, father. [*Holds out hand.*] Good-bye.

[Mr. Jackson *draws himself up and puts his hands behind his back with awful dignity.*]

You may as well. After all, I'm your son. And if I'm a sweep, it's your fault.

Mr. Jackson [*takes his hand after a moment's hesitation*]. Good-bye.

[Eustace *goes slowly towards door.*]

You may write occasionally, just to let us know how you are.

Eustace [*offering cheque, with a grim smile*]. Make it three hundred, father—and I won't write.

[Mr. Jackson *is about to protest angrily, then, recognising the uselessness of that proceeding, says nothing, but waves cheque contemptuously away.* Eustace, *still smiling, pockets it.*]

No? Well, have it your own way. Good-bye. Good-bye, Henry. [*Nods to him without offering to shake hands, and goes out as the curtain falls.*]

THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME

A COMEDY FOR PHILANTHROPISTS

(1905)

"The souls of the just are in the hands of God"

CHARACTERS

LADY DENISON.
MARGERY, *her daughter.*
MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *Lady Denison's sister-in-law.*
MRS. HORROCKS.
MISS TRIGGS.
GENERAL BONSOR.
MR. FIRKET.
HUGH VERREKER.
BASIL HYLTON.
SOAMES, *Lady Denison's butler.*
WILLIAM, *Lady Denison's footman.*
ANSON, *Lady Denison's maid.*

The action of the play passes at Priors Ashton, Lady Denison's house in the country, Acts I, II, and III in the Drawing-room, Act IV in the Dining-room. A week passes between Acts I and II, one hour between Acts II and III, and a week between Acts III and IV.

THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME

ACT I

SCENE.—*The drawing-room at Priors Ashton,* LADY DENISON'S *house in the country; a handsome room in the Adam style. On the right are double doors leading from the hall. Similar doors on the left lead to* LADY DENISON'S *own sitting-room. At the back of the stage are French windows, one on each side of the fireplace. These give on to a terrace, of which the low brick boundary wall, ornamented at intervals by stone balls on squat brick piers, is seen through the windows. Beyond the terrace the garden stretches away into the distance. Beyond that the open country, bathed in the sunshine of a hot September afternoon. The French window on the left of the fireplace is closed, but that on the right stands wide open.*

When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then LADY DENISON *is seen to pass the French window on the left, followed by her daughter* MARGERY. *A moment later they enter by the window on the right.* LADY DENISON *is a kindly, comfortable lady of about forty-eight.* MARGERY *is a very pretty girl of twenty-two.*

LADY DENISON. I don't think I'll go out again, Margery. The sun is rather hot, and it tires my eyes. *You* go if you like.

MARGERY. I'd rather stay with you, mother. The others will get on quite well without me for a little. Where will you sit?

LADY DENISON. Here, I think. [*Settling herself into an arm-chair with a sigh of contentment.*] I do hope they're enjoying themselves. Do you think they are?

MARGERY [*nods*]. I think so.

LADY DENISON. That's right. [*Looking round vaguely.*] I wonder where I put my work?

MARGERY. Here it is. Shall I bring it?

[*Brings two wicker work-baskets from side table.*

LADY DENISON. Thank you, dear. I knew I'd left it somewhere. I wish this strip was finished. I'm getting so tired of it.

[*Gets out long strip of woollen crochet of a brilliant red hue.*

MARGERY. Poor mother! It'll soon be done now.

LADY DENISON [*beginning to crochet*]. How are *yours* getting on?

MARGERY [*who has begun on a blue strip of equal brilliancy*]. Nearly finished. This is my last.

LADY DENISON [*sighs*]. I've still two more to do.

MARGERY. I'll do one of them for you, mother.

LADY DENISON. No, dear. I shall manage. But next time I shall give *blankets*.

MARGERY. But that wouldn't be the same as *making* something, would it?

LADY DENISON. That's why I should prefer it.

MARGERY. Lazy!

LADY DENISON. I'm so glad Mr. Hylton is coming down. He'll help us to entertain all these people.

MARGERY. Yes. Isn't it lucky he and Miss Triggs and Aunt Emily could all come by the same train! The carriage will only have to go to the station once.

LADY DENISON. I do hope Miss Triggs will like being here.

MARGERY [*cheerfully*]. I think she will. Poor thing,

her lodgings looked dreadfully poor and uncomfortable when I went to see her. Here at least she'll have proper meals and feel she's among friends.

LADY DENISON. Where have you put her?

MARGERY. In the little room next mine. It's rather small, but the house is so full just now. I wanted to put her next Aunt Emily. But Aunt Emily always insists on having that room for her maid.

LADY DENISON. How long do you think she'll stay?

MARGERY. Two or three weeks, I hope. Long enough to give her a thorough rest and change.

[*Further conversation is interrupted by the entrance of* WILLIAM, *the footman. His face wears an expression of portentous gravity.*]

WILLIAM. Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON. Certainly. What is it, William?

[*Puts down crochet.*

WILLIAM [*hesitating*]. If you please, my lady . . . I should like to give notice.

MARGERY [*astonished*]. Give notice, William?

WILLIAM. Yes, miss.

LADY DENISON. Why *now*, William?

WILLIAM. I'm very sorry, my lady, to have to give notice at all . . . after being with your ladyship so many years——

LADY DENISON. Yes, yes. But why give notice *now?* The proper time to give notice is surely ten o'clock in the morning, when I am seeing the housekeeper?

WILLIAM. Very good, my lady.

[*Turns to leave the room.*

MARGERY. Stop, William.

[WILLIAM *stops and faces round.*]

Why do you *want* to give notice? You've always been a good servant. Have you found another situation?

WILLIAM. No, miss. And I don't *want* to give notice. I hope you won't think that, miss.

LADY DENISON [*plaintively*]. Then why *do* it, William?

WILLIAM [*hesitating*]. Well, my lady . . . It's on account of Soames. [*Hesitates again.*

MARGERY. Soames?

WILLIAM. Yes, miss. As long as Wilkins was here things were better. Not but what we had our quarrels in the servants' hall even then. On account of *Thomas*, you remember, miss?

MARGERY. I remember.

WILLIAM. But with Soames it's different, miss. Soames and I——

LADY DENISON [*interrupting*]. Have you spoken to the housekeeper?

WILLIAM. Yes, my lady. But Mrs. Meredith says *she* can do nothing. Soames is that violent and his language quite awful when spoken to. So she said I had better come to you, my lady.

LADY DENISON [*plaintive again*]. How very annoying of Mrs. Meredith.

MARGERY [*rather shocked*]. Has Soames been using bad language to *you*, William?

WILLIAM. Yes, miss. Not that I mind *that*. But there's other things . . . and in fact him and me don't hit it off. So perhaps I'd better leave at the month, my lady.

MARGERY. Nonsense, William. Why, you've been with us ever since you were a boy.

WILLIAM. Yes, miss. And never thought to leave her ladyship so long as *she* was satisfied.

MARGERY. Very well. Mother is perfectly satisfied, and you must stay. And you must try and be patient with Soames. He *has* rather a bad temper with other servants, I know, but I'm sure he tries to conquer it. And *you* must help him. Will you?

WILLIAM [*doubtfully*]. Very well, miss.

MARGERY [*brightly*]. That's right. And then you'll see things will go better. Things always go better if only one tries to *help* people, don't they?

WILLIAM [*still more doubtfully*]. Yes, miss.

LADY DENISON. And I'll speak to Soames to-morrow morning.

WILLIAM. Thank you, my lady. Thank you, miss. [*Turns to go again.*

LADY DENISON. And will you please send Anson to me, William?

WILLIAM. Yes, my lady.

[WILLIAM *goes out.* LADY DENISON *resumes her crochet with a sigh.*]

LADY DENISON. How troublesome servants are! I did think after *Thomas* went we should have no more quarrelling. And now it's Soames.

MARGERY. Well, of course, we didn't engage Thomas because he was a *good* servant, did we? And it's the same with Soames.

LADY DENISON. I suppose so. But it certainly makes helping people more difficult if they won't exercise a little self-control.

MARGERY [*with unanswerable logic*]. If they had more self-control they wouldn't *need* help, would they, mother dear?

LADY DENISON. I wonder if it would be a good thing to ask Mr. Hylton to speak to Soames?

MARGERY [*enthusiastic*]. Oh yes, I'm sure it would. Mr. Hylton has such a wonderful influence with people.

LADY DENISON. Very well. I'll ask him this evening —if I remember.

Enter ANSON, LADY DENISON'S *maid.* ANSON *is a young person of attractive appearance, but just now looks rather ill and rather frightened.*

ANSON. You sent for me, my lady?

LADY DENISON. Yes, Anson. I want you to look at the mantle I wore this morning. The trimming has come unstitched.

ANSON [*relieved*]. Is that all, my lady?

LADY DENISON. Yes. I meant to tell you about it before luncheon. I thought I would speak about it now while I remember.

ANSON. Very good, my lady.

[*Turns to go.* MARGERY *stops her.*

MARGERY [*kindly*]. Is anything the matter, Anson? You don't look well.

ANSON. Nothing, thank you, miss.

MARGERY. Would you like to see the doctor? We can easily send for him.

ANSON [*alarmed*]. Oh no, miss.

MARGERY. You're quite sure?

ANSON. *Quite*, thank you, miss. I'd *much* rather not have the doctor. [ANSON *goes out.*

MARGERY. I'm afraid something must be the matter with Anson. She's looked wretched lately. And she used to be so bright.

LADY DENISON [*placidly*]. I dare say she's only bilious.

[*At this point* MRS. HORROCKS *comes in from the terrace, followed by* MR. HUGH VERREKER. MRS. HORROCKS *is a thick-set, red-faced, pompous woman of no breeding.* VERREKER *is a handsome, rather devil-may-care young man of nine and twenty.*]

MARGERY [*looking round, with a smile*]. Are you coming in, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER. Yes. It's cooler here than on the terrace.

LADY DENISON. Margery, give Mrs. Horrocks a cushion.

[MRS. HORROCKS *sinks massively on to a sofa, where* MARGERY *proceeds to make her comfortable*].

I hope you've had a pleasant afternoon?

MRS. HORROCKS. Quite, thank you.

VERREKER [*taking a seat by* MARGERY]. Mrs. Horrocks has had no end of a good time. She's been telling me the entire history of the Horrocks family from its remotest past. It appears the first of the Horrockses was a historian in the reign of Theodoric. His name was Orosius. Orosius . . . Horrocks, you perceive. Transliteration by Grimm's law.

LADY DENISON [*who never recognises sarcasm even when she can see it*]. How very interesting.

VERREKER [*blandly*]. It was!

MARGERY. Have you left General Bonsor in the garden?

VERREKER. No. He's just coming. He wants his tea. *He's* enjoyed himself, too, by the way. He's been telling Mr. Firket a story about India for the last two hours. Poor Firket! And it's going on still.

[*Which indeed appears to be the case, for the loud voice of* GENERAL BONSOR *at this moment comes booming in from the terrace in the midst of one of his interminable stories. He and* FIRKET *are seen to pass the French window on the left, and then enter by that on the right.* GENERAL BONSOR *is a lean, liverish Anglo-Indian of sixty-five or so, with a sparse, grizzled moustache.* MR. FIRKET *is a pallid, deprecating little man in spectacles, whose neat black clothes look rather pathetically seedy.*]

GENERAL BONSOR. So I said to Fennesey—Fennesey was our senior major. Thorough sportsman he was! Shoot a tiger as soon as look at him! Got killed afterwards out in the Sunderbunds. Tiger ate him. Very sad. However—I said to Fennesey: "Fennesey, my boy, if you don't keep that dash'd Khansamah of yours in order," I said,

"you'll poison the whole cantonment." Fennesey laughed at that like anything. You should have seen how he did *laugh!*

[General Bonsor *laughs immoderately.*]

So when the judge and I and Travers were dining with him a week or two later—[*turning sharply on* Firket, *whose attention is clearly wandering*]—I told you about Travers, didn't I?

Mr. Firket [*pulling himself together with an effort*]. Eh? No, I think not.

General Bonsor. Ah! I must. Or you won't understand the story. Travers was in the Guides. He married—let me see, whom *did* he marry? I shall remember in a moment. [*Pauses, cudgelling his brain.*

Lady Denison. Won't you sit down, Mr. Firket? You look quite tired.

Mr. Firket [*faintly*]. Thank you. [*Sinks on to chair as far as possible from the* General. *The* General, *however, pursues him relentlessly.*]

General Bonsor. Blake—Blake—Blakesley! *That* was the name! She was the daughter of old Tom Blakesley of the Police. But I never knew him. He was on the Bombay side. Travers died afterwards of enteric at Bundelcund, I think, or was it Chittagong? Yes, it was Chittagong, I remember, because I had a touch of fever there myself a year or two later. Well, to go back to Fennesey——

Margery [*coming to the rescue*]. Can you spare Mr. Firket to me for a little, General? I want him to wind some wool for mother.

General Bonsor. Eh? Oh, certainly, certainly.

[*The* General *turns away pettishly, much annoyed at being interrupted in his story, which, he is convinced, was reaching its most enthralling moment.* Mr. Firket *breathes a sigh of relief.*]

MARGERY. Do you mind, Mr. Firket? You did the last for her so well.

MR. FIRKET. Not at all, Miss Denison. On the contrary!

VERREKER [*to* MARGERY, *under his breath*]. I call that real tact!

MARGERY. Hush!

[MR. FIRKET *is set to wind red wool, which he does contentedly till tea comes in. The* GENERAL *moons about sulkily for a minute or two, and then takes a seat on the sofa by* MRS. HORROCKS, *who makes room for him with marked unwillingness.*]

MRS. HORROCKS [*to* LADY DENISON]. What a lot of work you do, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON. Yes. This is a crochet counterpane for old Mrs. Buckley. It's very ugly, isn't it? [*Holds it up disparagingly.*] Margery and I each have to do eight strips. Then we fasten them together, like this. [*Puts red and blue strips side by side, in which position the effect they produce is simply paralysing.*] Mrs. Buckley's eighty-three next week, and almost blind. That's why Margery chose such bright colours. So that she might be able to *see* them, you know. Aren't they *detestable?*

MARGERY. There's my last finished. [*Holds up strip in triumph.*] Sure you wouldn't like me to do one of yours, mother?

LADY DENISON. No, thanks, dear. If I stopped doing this I should only have to begin on Mrs. Jackson's stockings. I'll do my share.

MARGERY. All right. Then I can get on with something else. [*Gets handkerchief-case out of basket.*

VERREKER [*remonstrating*]. I say, you're not going to begin another thing straight off?

MARGERY. Not *begin.* This is half done. It's a handkerchief-case.

VERREKER. Is it for yourself?

MARGERY. No, it's for Mr. Hylton.

VERREKER. The man who's coming down this afternoon?

MARGERY. Yes. Those are his initials.

[*Shows them.*

VERREKER. B. H.?

MARGERY. Yes; his name's Basil. It's a pretty name, isn't it? [*Starts working on them.*

VERREKER. Why are you working him a handkerchief-case?

MARGERY. I thought he'd like one.

VERREKER. Well, *I'd* like a handkerchief-case. Why don't you work one for me?

MARGERY. Perhaps you don't deserve one.

VERREKER. I don't. But you said this morning when one did things for people one oughtn't to think of what they deserve but what they want.

MARGERY. And *you* said, "What rot."

VERREKER. Well, I've changed my mind. I think you're quite right. And I want a handkerchief-case. *My* initials are H. V.

MARGERY. Isn't that rather a sudden conversion?

VERREKER. It's none the worse for that. Besides, now I come to think of it, I do deserve one. [*Dropping his voice.*] I played billiards with old Firket this morning —to please *you.*

MARGERY [*working steadily*]. To please *him.*

VERREKER. It didn't. I made a hundred while he made eight. He simply hated it. Old Firket's a perfect ass at billiards—though he says he can give me thirty per cent. off any kind of billiard-table that's made.

MARGERY. Still, it was nice of you to play with him.

VERREKER. It was. I shan't do it again. And I think I ought to have a handkerchief-case for doing it at all.

MARGERY. Very well. You shall have the next.

VERREKER. Not the next. This one.

MARGERY. No, no. This is Mr. Hylton's. It's the first time he's been to stay with us. He works very hard while he's in London, and scarcely ever gives himself a holiday. So I promised if he'd come and spend a fortnight with us this summer I'd work him something. This is it.

GENERAL BONSOR [*looking at his watch testily*]. I thought you had tea at *five*, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. So we do, General. Is it five yet?

GENERAL BONSOR. Twelve minutes past. Twelve and a half.

LADY DENISON. I'm so sorry. I suppose they're waiting for the others. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh, comes to-day. And Mr. Hylton. And Miss Triggs. You've met my sister-in-law, I think?

GENERAL BONSOR. Yes. Met her in Madrid when Eversleigh was at the Embassy there. I was at Gibraltar.

LADY DENISON. He's at Vienna now. I wish he wasn't. It's such a long way off. We see simply nothing of them.

GENERAL BONSOR. Not in London this season?

LADY DENISON. No. And my brother can't get away even now. So Emily is coming by herself. I do hope she's not going to be late.

GENERAL BONSOR [*unappeased*]. She *is* late. But everybody's late nowadays. It's the fashion. And a doosid bad fashion, too. When I was at Alleghur in '76——

LADY DENISON. I don't think it's her fault. Perhaps the train——

GENERAL BONSOR. Just so! Her train's late, of course. *That's* the English railway system all over. The trains run anyhow, simply anyhow. Why, when *I* was at Alleghur——

LADY DENISON [*interrupting him desperately in the hope of staving off a story—which for the moment she successfully does*]. It may not be the train, General. Perhaps one of the

horses . . . However, I really don't think we'll wait any longer. Will you ring, Mr. Verreker?

[VERREKER *does so.*]

MR. FIRKET [*persuasively*]. You ought to have a motor, Lady Denison. Much more reliable than horses. I can get you twenty per cent. off any pattern you like to choose if you think of it.

LADY DENISON. Thank you very much, Mr. Firket. But I'm old-fashioned. I think I shall stick to horses.

MR. FIRKET. Well, if you *should* change your mind, just apply to me, that's all.

LADY DENISON. I won't forget.

Enter SOAMES.

Bring tea, Soames. We won't wait for Mrs. Eversleigh.

SOAMES. Very good, my lady. [SOAMES *goes out.*

GENERAL BONSOR [*clears his throat*]. As I was saying, when I was at Alleghur——

MR. FIRKET [*insinuatingly, to* LADY DENISON]. I might make it five-and-twenty per cent. with some makers——

GENERAL BONSOR [*sternly*]. As I was saying . . . *as* I was saying . . . [*A hush falls.*] When I was at Alleghur in '76 . . . [*Annoyed.*] There now, I've forgotten what I *was* going to say! . . . [*Consoling them.*] But it'll come back to me. . . . Ever at Alleghur, Verreker, when you were in India?

VERREKER. For a few months.

MRS. HORROCKS [*trying to head off the* GENERAL]. What was your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER. Beastly place, I thought it.

MRS. HORROCKS [*louder*]. What *was* your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Horrocks. The Munsters.

GENERAL BONSOR [*delighted*]. Then you knew Toby Nicholson! He commands the Munsters, doesn't he?

VERREKER [*hesitates*]. Yes.

GENERAL BONSOR. Why, *I* know Toby. First-rate chap! Knew him when he was a subaltern. I must write to the old beggar. Where are the Munsters now?

VERREKER [*who seems bored with the subject*]. Shorncliffe, I believe.

[*The sun begins to set in a glory of crimson, but is quite unable to stop the* GENERAL. *Nobody notices it, in fact, until the red glow attracts* MARGERY'S *attention a few minutes later.*]

GENERAL BONSOR. Good! I'll write to-night, by Jove. I'd like to hear from Toby again. I've not seen him since we were at Poonah together. [*Triumphantly.*] *That* reminds me of what I was going to tell you! . . . . When I was at Alleghur in '76 we had a train from Goomti that was timed to arrive at Alleghur at 6.38. Just in time to change before dinner, don't you know. Well, that train was *always* late, *always*, by Jove! So I said to Macpherson . . . he was superintendent of the Alleghur-Goomti line. Good chap Mac. Very good judge of a horse. Died of cholera, I remember in '81—or was it '82? . . . Anyhow, I said to him, "Mac, my boy, I'll race your dashed little train from the Boondi Bridge to the station"—that's the last three miles into Alleghur—"with my pony and trap for a hundred rupees."

[*During this speech* SOAMES *and* WILLIAM *have brought in tea. A certain hostility is just visible between them, but very discreetly shown. They put the tea on the table by* LADY DENISON, *and go out.* MARGERY *goes to the table, sits down, and begins to pour out. Her questions about cream and sugar, and* LADY DENISON'S *hospitable offers of tea-cake, sadly interrupt the thread of the* GENERAL'S *story, but he struggles on defiantly.*]

MARGERY. Does every one take cream?

MRS. HORROCKS. Milk for me, please. And *one* lump of sugar.

VERREKER. *Two* lumps for me.

GENERAL BONSOR. . . . Well, old Mac wasn't at all pleased at that. He was awfully proud of his little one-horse line. It was opened in '72, I remember. Pat Ellis was traffic manager. Ellis had been——

MARGERY. Will you give that to Mrs. Horrocks, Mr. Verreker? And this to mother?

GENERAL BONSOR. Ellis had been——

LADY DENISON. You'll find some tea-cake under that cover, Mrs. Horrocks.

GENERAL BONSOR. As I was saying——

MRS. HORROCKS. Thank you.

GENERAL BONSOR. *As* I was saying! . . . [*Glares. Silence falls.*] . . . Ellis had been on the Bengal-Nagpore line before he came to Goomti. He was a son of old General Ellis, who was killed in the first Sikh war. He married——

VERREKER [*bringing cup*]. Your tea, General.

GENERAL BONSOR [*irritably*]. In a moment. In a moment. . . . He married Nellie Tremayne, daughter of Tremayne of the 63rd. Tremayne had four daughters, I remember——

LADY DENISON [*loud whisper*]. Will you cut that cake, Mr. Verreker, and see if anybody would like some?

[VERREKER *does so, with elaborate precautions as to silence.* GENERAL BONSOR *meantime goes on steadily with his story in his loud authoritative voice, and enjoys himself thoroughly.*]

GENERAL BONSOR. Kitty, the eldest, married Molyneux, who was afterwards commissioner at Ranigunj. One of his sons was gazetted the other day to the Shropshires. Another went into the Navy. Maud, the second girl, married Monty Robertson. He was a gunner. They lived

in a little house outside Alleghur just where the road forks. One way leads to Balaghai, the other leads to . . . tut-tut, what's the name of that place the Alleghur road goes to, Verreker ?

VERREKER [*who is handing tea-cake*]. I don't know. Alleghur, I suppose.

GENERAL BONSOR [*annoyed*]. No, no ! Kupri ! *That's* the name. Kupri ! There was one more daughter, but I don't remember what became of her. . . . No, there were only three of them, I recollect. It was *Ainslie* who had four daughters. The Four Graces we used to call them—because there were four of them.

LADY DENISON [*still whispering*]. Some more tea, Mr. Firket ?

[*But* MR. FIRKET *murmurs "No" with infinite precaution, and puts down cup.*]

GENERAL BONSOR. . . . Ainslie was Superintendent of Police and afterwards went to Central India. But I was going to tell you about that race. Well, I took the trap——

SOAMES [*announcing*]. Mrs. Eversleigh, Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton.

[SOAMES, *having shown in the new arrivals in the order named, goes out.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *is a prosperous, well-dressed, rather hard-looking woman of forty-five,* MISS TRIGGS *a lean, angular lady of thirty-four, with thin lips tightly compressed, clothed in meagre, tight-fitting black garments.* HYLTON *is a handsome man of forty. A good face, but not in the least solemn or ascetic. Clothes quite human and unclerical.*]

LADY DENISON [*rising*]. Dear Emily, how are you ? [*Kisses her.*] The General's story was so interesting I never heard the carriage. You know General Bonsor, don't you ?

[General Bonsor *and* Mrs. Eversleigh *shake hands.*]

How do you do, Miss Triggs? How do you do, Mr. Hylton? [*Shakes hands with them.*

Margery. How do you do, Aunt Emily? [*Kisses her.*] I hope you've not had a tiring journey, Miss Triggs? [*Shakes hands with her and* Hylton, *bestowing a smile of welcome on the latter.*

Lady Denison. I must introduce you all. Mrs. Horrocks, this is my sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh. [*Bow.*] Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton: General Bonsor, Mr. Firket, Mr. Verreker.

[*Confused bowing from everybody.*]

Margery. And now you'll all have some tea. You must be dying for it. Do you know you're dreadfully late?

General Bonsor. I was just saying before you came in, Mrs. Eversleigh, the English railways are the most unpunctual in the world.

Mrs. Eversleigh [*frigidly*]. Indeed? I believe our train was *before* its time. But one of the horses got a stone in its shoe or something, and Hollings took about half an hour getting it out.

Mr. Firket [*triumphantly*]. What did I tell you, Lady Denison. You'd much better have a motor.

[Lady Denison *shakes her head smilingly.*]

Margery. Your tea, Aunt Emily. [*Takes it to her.*] Cream and sugar, Miss Triggs?

Miss Triggs [*crisply*]. No tea for me, thank you. I never drink tea unless it is *quite* fresh made.

Margery [*cheerfully*]. Then I'll order some fresh for you. Mr. Verreker, will you ring?

Miss Triggs. Pray don't trouble. I can do *quite* well without any tea.

MARGERY. It's no trouble.

[VERREKER *rings.*]

Bread-and-butter, Aunt Emily?

[MRS. EVERSLEIGH *takes some.*]

LADY DENISON. You look dreadfully overworked, as usual, Mr. Hylton. You must have a complete rest while you're down here. [*To* MISS TRIGGS.] Mr. Hylton works a great deal among the poor in London.

MISS TRIGGS. Indeed? [*To* HYLTON, *sweetly.*] Do you find that does any good?

HYLTON [*smiling*]. I hope so. . . .

MISS TRIGGS. What *kind* of work do you do?

HYLTON. Oh, preaching and writing and so on.

MISS TRIGGS [*interested.*] Preaching? Are you a clergyman?

MARGERY. Mr. Hylton is the Founder of the Church of Humanity.

MISS TRIGGS [*disappointed*]. Oh! Not a *real* clergyman.

[*There is a general gasp from every one at this remark, except from* MISS TRIGGS *herself, who seems quite unconscious of having said anything outrageous. Luckily, before she can commit herself further,* SOAMES *enters. He carries a teapot on a salver.*]

MARGERY. Some fresh tea, Soames.

SOAMES. Yes, miss.

[*Puts new teapot in place of old one, which he takes away. He goes out.*

MARGERY [*hospitably*]. *Now* you can have your tea, Miss Triggs.

[*Gives cup to her and takes* MRS. EVERSLEIGH'S.

MRS. HORROCKS. Where *is* the Church of Humanity, Mr. Hylton? I don't think I've ever been in it.

HYLTON [*quite simply*]. The Church of Humanity is everywhere.

MRS. HORROCKS. But the *Church*, the building?

HYLTON. We have no building so far. I preach in halls and different places about London, which we hire.

MISS TRIGGS. I don't call that being *everywhere*. I call that being *nowhere*. . .

HYLTON [*quite good-tempered*]. In one sense, of course.

MARGERY [*more to cover up* MISS TRIGGS' *second lapse than from a desire to feed* MRS. EVERSLEIGH]. Give that to Aunt Emily, Mr. Verreker.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*to* VERREKER, *who brings her back her cup.*] Are you one of the Norfolk Verrekers? I met Sir Montague in London two seasons ago.

VERREKER. He's my uncle.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I remember he was very full of some experiments he was making . . . with turnips. To combat agricultural depression, I think.

VERREKER. I dare say. Uncle Montague's always muddling round with that kind of thing.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. It doesn't interest you, apparently.

VERREKER. Not in the least. But it amuses him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Is he working at it still?

VERREKER [*carelessly*]. Probably. I've not seen him for the last four years.

MARGERY [*noticing the red glow of the setting sun which now fills the room, and turning to look through the window*]. *What* a lovely sunset! Come, all of you. [*Going on to terrace.*] We *must* go out and see it. Mrs. Horrocks, General, Aunt Emily. Come.

LADY DENISON. Margery! Emily hasn't finished her tea yet. Nor has Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS [*rising*]. Thank you. I have quite done.

MARGERY [*who is standing just outside the French window*]. Come to the end of the terrace. You can't see it properly from here. Be quick, or it'll be gone. Come along.

[*All the visitors troop off after* MARGERY *except* MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *They are seen to pass the window on the left before they disappear.* LADY DENISON *remains to entertain her sister.*]

LADY DENISON. How did you leave Edward, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Very well, I think. He's had a lot of work to do lately, and that always seems to suit him. How have *you* been?

LADY DENISON. Quite well, thanks.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Who are all these dreadful people you've got down here?

LADY DENISON [*protesting*]. Not *dreadful*, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Aren't they? I can hardly imagine a more dreadful visitor than General Bonsor. He's the greatest bore in London. Edward says he's nearly emptied three of the Service Clubs. I thought people had given up inviting him.

LADY DENISON [*placidly*]. That's why we asked him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*puzzled*]. I beg your pardon?

LADY DENISON. That's why we asked him. You see, he's getting an old man, and it seemed so unkind that nobody would have him to their houses. Of course, his stories *are* rather long. But I suppose he can't make them any shorter. So Margery thought if we asked him down for ten days he might enjoy it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I think it very unlikely *we* shall enjoy it. [*Rises and puts down cup.*

LADY DENISON. Would you mind ringing while you're up, Emily? Then Soames can take away.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*does so*]. Who's that Miss Triggs?

LADY DENISON. She's a governess. She teaches German.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Is she going to teach you?

LADY DENISON [*emphatically*]. Oh, *no*, Emily. Margery did suggest it. But I refused. Miss Triggs is only here as a visitor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I see. [*Returns to her seat.*

LADY DENISON. Margery met her at the Hammonds'. She taught Cecily for a few weeks—till they could get some one else. She's very poor, I'm afraid, and doesn't get many pupils. So Margery thought it would be kind to ask her to stay.

Enter SOAMES.

You can take away, Soames. And turn on the lights.

SOAMES. Yes, my lady.

[SOAMES *turns on the electric lights and removes the tea things.* LADY DENISON *resumes her interrupted crochet.*]

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Are all your visitors invited on this penitential system?

LADY DENISON. Except you, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Except me, of course. That Mr. Firker, for instance?

LADY DENISON [*correcting her*]. Firket. He's something in the City. I'm not sure what. But nothing very prosperous, I'm afraid. He used to be a stockbroker, but he failed. And now he sells things on commission. I believe that's what it's called. He's always wanting to sell me a new billiard table or a bicycle or a sewing machine. To-day it was a motor-car. I shall have to buy something from him before he leaves, I know.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Where do you pick up these extraordinary people?

LADY DENISON [*quite simply*]. Margery found Mr. Firket. On the Underground Railway.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Where?*

LADY DENISON. At South Kensington, I think. But it may have been Sloane Square. It was in a first-class carriage, and Mr. Firket only had a third-class ticket. An inspector came round and wanted to take him up. So Margery paid his fare, and then, of course, they became friends.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Naturally !

LADY DENISON. He's been with us nearly a week. He goes on Monday.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm glad to hear it.

LADY DENISON. Mrs. Horrocks we met in a hotel at Mentone. The other people at the hotel would hardly speak to her. They were quite rude about it. Which seemed very unkind, as she is only dull and rather vulgar. And she can't *help* that, can she ? So Margery said we must be *nice* to her. And later on, when we were arranging whom to have down, we thought *she* should be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Surely this is rather a new departure of yours, Muriel ? You were always perfectly ridiculous about what you call being kind to people. But it never used to be as bad as this.

LADY DENISON. It's Mr. Hylton's idea. He calls it beginning one's charity at home. He wants every one to do it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. How curious. He *looks* sane enough.

LADY DENISON. Of course he's sane, Emily. Mr. Hylton is a very clever man. He writes *books*.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. But why does Mr. Hylton think you should fill your houses with wild beasts in this way ? Is it for the good of *their* souls or of yours ?

LADY DENISON [*quite impervious to her sister's sarcasm*]. Both, I think. It was in a sermon he preached—on the true hospitality and the false. It was a beautiful sermon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Which is this ?

LADY DENISON. The *true*, of course. *False* hospitality is inviting people because you like them. *True* hospitality is inviting them because they'd like to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Ah ! . . . I wish you'd thought of mentioning in your letter that you were practising true hospitality just now. Then I wouldn't have come.

LADY DENISON. Now you're being worldly, Emily.

And when people are worldly it always makes me drop my stitches. [*Does so.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why was Mr. Verreker asked, by the way? I suppose there's something shady about him as *he's* here?

LADY DENISON. I don't think so. Margery met him at a dance at the Fitz Allens'. His parents are both dead and he's quarrelled with his uncle, and altogether seems rather alone in the world. So Margery thought he was *quite* a person to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why did he quarrel with his uncle?

LADY DENISON. About his leaving the army, I think.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why did he leave the army?

LADY DENISON. I don't know, Emily, I never asked.

[MRS. EVERSLEIGH *shrugs her shoulders impatiently.*]

That's all we've got at present.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And quite enough, too. I hope they're all properly grateful?

LADY DENISON [*astonished that her sister should not have grasped this*]. They don't *know*. Of course, we shouldn't *dream* of telling them. It would spoil all their pleasure. They think they're asked here because we *like* them. If they didn't they wouldn't enjoy it half so much. People do so love to feel they're *wanted.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. It must be an unusual sensation with the General! [*The sneer passes unregarded by* LADY DENISON, *who has dropped another stitch.*] How long has Mr. Hylton been preaching in this absurd way?

LADY DENISON. He has been working among the poor for years, I believe. But it was only this season that people one knew began to go to him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Does he make converts?

LADY DENISON. I suppose so. His services were crowded.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Indeed? I must remember to

take Edward when we are next in London. Edward always enjoys a new religion.

LADY DENISON. Won't you talk to Mr. Hylton while he's down here?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I shall make a point of doing so. London is changing very much, Muriel. Twenty years ago every one in society went to church—or, at least, pretended to do so. Nowadays people seem to go anywhere!

[MARGERY *returns from her sunset, followed by* MRS. HORROCKS *and* MISS TRIGGS. *The glow has faded from the sky and twilight is falling.*]

MARGERY. It's been *such* a lovely sunset, Aunt Emily. You *were* lazy not to come out.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Your mother and I have been talking.

MARGERY. Can Mrs. Horrocks write a letter in your room, mother? The General's in the library with Mr. Firket, and that's rather disturbing.

LADY DENISON. Certainly. Will you turn on the lights, Margery? You'll find note-paper and things on my table, Mrs. Horrocks.

MRS. HORROCKS [*graciously*]. Thank you so much, Lady Denison.

[MARGERY *turns on the switch by the door of* LADY DENISON'S *room on the left.* MRS. HORROCKS *goes off.* MARGERY *closes the door after her, and turns to* MISS TRIGGS.]

MARGERY. *Now* I can show you your room, Miss Triggs, if you will come upstairs.

LADY DENISON. I'm afraid we have had to give you a *very* small room, Miss Triggs. But the house is so full just now.

MISS TRIGGS [*sweetly*]. *Pray* don't apologise, Lady Denison. Of course, I know persons who are compelled

to support themselves by *teaching* cannot expect to be treated with *ceremony!* *Anything* will do for *me*.

LADY DENISON. I assure you——

MISS TRIGGS. Not at all. I *quite* understand.

LADY DENISON. But really, Miss Triggs——

MISS TRIGGS [*firmly*]. *Please* do not trouble to say any more. It is quite unnecessary. Shall we go, Miss Denison? [*Stalks out, followed by* MARGERY.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What an intolerable woman!

LADY DENISON. I do think she might have let me explain.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Explain! I should have packed her out of the house if I'd been in your place.

LADY DENISON. I don't think Mr. Hylton would approve of *that*.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Then Mr. Hylton should do his own entertaining. Why doesn't he have Miss Triggs to stay with *him?*

LADY DENISON. Emily! Mr. Hylton is a bachelor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I suppose so. People with absurd theories about life usually *are* bachelors. But I don't think Miss Triggs would have come to any harm. She's excessively plain.

LADY DENISON [*shocked*]. Really, Emily, what dreadful things you say. I don't think living in Vienna can be at all good for you.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*ignoring this rebuke*]. What I can't understand is why, if you *must* be kind to people—which seems to me quite unnecessary—you shouldn't choose agreeable people instead of disagreeable ones.

LADY DENISON [*worried*]. I'm afraid I can't make it any clearer. But Mr. Hylton will tell you. [HYLTON *is seen to pass the window on the left.*] Here he is. [*He enters by the other window.*] Mr. Hylton, will you kindly explain to Mrs. Eversleigh why I have to be kind to disagreeable people? I never can remember, and Margery isn't here.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*with dangerous sweetness*]. My sister-in-law has been telling me about your peculiar doctrines, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON [*quite sincere and matter-of-fact*]. You see, Mrs. Eversleigh, agreeable people don't need friends to be kind to them. They have plenty already. Disagreeable people have not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*briskly*]. If people are disagreeable they don't deserve kindness.

HYLTON [*smiling*]. It's not what people *deserve* but what they *want* that matters, don't you think? In fact, often the less people deserve the more we ought to help them. They need it more.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm afraid that's hardly a view you can expect me to take seriously, Mr. Hylton. It's very *modern* and original, but it's not *serious*.

HYLTON [*gently*]. I should hardly have called it *modern*. Usen't we to be taught that it was our duty to love our enemies?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes. But only on Sundays. And no one ever *dreamed* of doing it. So, of course, that didn't matter. You want Lady Denison to *do* it.

HYLTON [*more gravely*]. I certainly think the world would be a happier place and a better place if people helped each other because they needed help irrespective of whether they deserved it or not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. That is certainly a convenient doctrine for your friend Miss Triggs.

HYLTON [*smiling again*]. What has my friend Miss Triggs been about? I never met her till this afternoon, by the way.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Still, it's on *your* principles that she was invited. And her manners are insufferable.

HYLTON. A little brusque perhaps. But I dare say it's only shyness. She has never been here before, has she, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. No.

HYLTON. And lots of people are shy in a strange house, aren't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Her shyness certainly takes a singularly unpleasant form.

HYLTON [*cheerfully*]. Well, we must just set to work to be kind to her and make her enjoy her visit, and in a week or two she'll be a different woman. It's wonderful how a little kindness and goodwill soften people. Will you try?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*laughing*]. No, no, Mr. Hylton, *I'm* not going to join the Church of Humanity, not even to change Miss Triggs. Though I'm sure *any* change would be for the better.

HYLTON [*quite good-tempered*]. We shall convert you yet, you'll see.

[MARGERY *returns from looking after* MISS TRIGGS.]

LADY DENISON. Is Miss Triggs better satisfied with her room now, Margery?

MARGERY. Yes, I think so. . . . I've put her into mine.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What!

MARGERY. That's why I've been so long. I had to empty some of the drawers for her and move the bed.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Really, Margery!

MARGERY [*puzzled*]. What is it, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. To turn out of your own bedroom merely to please an ill-tempered German governess! I never heard of such a thing!

MARGERY [*who apparently has not considered the subject till now*]. Poor Miss Triggs. I suppose she *has* rather a curious temper. But I dare say she can't help it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Nonsense! She's a thoroughly ill-conditioned person.

MARGERY [*mildly*]. Well, Aunt Emily, there's no use being *angry* with her about it, is there? We must just be

nice to her and try and make her stay pleasant, and then I dare say she'll be better.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*sarcastically*]. So Mr. Hylton was good enough to suggest.

MARGERY [*throwing a bright smile to* HYLTON]. Then it's sure to be right. Mr. Hylton always knows how to manage people.

HYLTON [*rising*]. After that handsome compliment I think I'd better go upstairs. I have a letter or two to write before post—if it's not gone, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. No. The box isn't cleared till a quarter past seven. Where have you put Mr. Hylton, Margery?

MARGERY. In the Blue Room, mother. If you'll come, Mr. Hylton, I'll show you where it is.

HYLTON. Thank you.

[MARGERY *goes out to show* HYLTON *his room.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *looks after them thoughtfully for a moment. Then she turns to her sister and speaks.*]

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*meaningly*]. Margery seems to have a great admiration for your Mr. Hylton, Muriel.

LADY DENISON [*quite unconscious of what her sister is thinking of*]. Yes. She thinks a great deal of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Um. . . . Is he staying here long?

LADY DENISON. For a fortnight, I hope.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Is that *wise?*

LADY DENISON. What do you mean, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. It would be so tiresome if there were to be any foolish entanglement between him and Margery. Girls are so romantic about clergymen. And Mr. Hylton is a *sort* of clergyman, isn't he? Couldn't you send Margery away somewhere while he's here?

LADY DENISON [*still not seeing the point*]. But I don't

want to send Margery away. How am I to entertain Miss Triggs and Mrs. Horrocks without Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Nonsense, Muriel. Do please understand that Margery's future is of more importance than entertaining Miss Triggs. If Mr. Hylton were in orders it would be different. Edward might get some one to give him a living—though livings aren't what they were, of course. He might even become a bishop in time. Or at least a dean. But as he's only some kind of dissenter there's no use thinking of that. And if he were to propose to Margery while he was down here it might give us a great deal of trouble.

LADY DENISON [*surprised*]. But is Mr. Hylton going to propose to Margery? I've heard nothing about it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And won't—till it's too late. That kind of man has no proper feeling about these things. And, of course, he hasn't a sixpence.

LADY DENISON. Hasn't he, Emily? I thought he was quite well off.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *What!*

LADY DENISON [*placidly*]. I thought he had quite a large income. Only he gives it all away. At least, that was what Lady Wrexham told me. His place is close to theirs in Shropshire. But it's let just now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*on whom a light seems to dawn*]. My dear Muriel, why on earth didn't you say so before?

LADY DENISON. I didn't think you wanted to know about Mr. Hylton's income.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*refusing to believe that her sister's obtuseness is anything but assumed*]. Not want to know? Of course I want to know. It makes *all* the difference. If Mr. Hylton is a rich man and has a place in Shropshire it explains everything.

LADY DENISON [*puzzled*]. Explains what?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*impatiently*]. Your asking him here. And turning your house into a bear garden because

he tells you to. Of course, it flatters him. And it does no harm—for once. It's not as if you need know these people afterwards !

LADY DENISON [*shocked*]. Emily !

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*ignoring this interruption*]. I wonder what his income really is ? I must find out from Lady Wrexham. It'll be a great thing to have Margery properly settled. I was always afraid you might have some difficulty in finding a really suitable husband for her. She's so very *good*. And men don't like that. It frightens them. Yes, dear, you've done quite right, and I think you've been very clever about it. I didn't know you had it in you !

[LADY DENISON *gazes at her sister in hopeless bewilderment—and the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

SCENE.—LADY DENISON'S *drawing-room, as in the previous Act. Time, about half-past eleven in the morning. A week has elapsed since the events of the last Act. All* LADY DENISON'S *visitors are still with her save* MR. FIRKET, *who has returned to his obscure occupation in the City. When the curtain rises,* LADY DENISON *is discovered immersed in a German grammar, from which she is endeavouring to master the intricacies of the first declension.*

LADY DENISON. Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder. [*Looking up from book.*] Der Bruder, Des Bruder, Den Bruder. . . . No, that's wrong. [*Consults book again.*] Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder ! What a language !

[LADY DENISON *reads through the declension once more, with still greater emphasis on the "O," which she seems to find a relief for her feelings. She then puts down her book on her lap, and is about to try if she can repeat it correctly from memory, when she is interrupted by the entrance of her sister from the hall, carrying a half-finished letter.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *is not in the best of tempers.*]

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Here you are, Muriel. I was just going to your room to find you.

LADY DENISON. Miss Triggs is in there writing letters. [*Murmurs softly.*] Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder ——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Can you find a corner for me, too ?

When General Bonsor and Mrs. Horrocks are in the library together I feel like Daniel in the den of lions. It's impossible to write letters under those conditions.

LADY DENISON [*plaintively*]. *How* tiresome! I hoped they would get on better after that scene in the drawing-room last night.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm sure I don't know why. If you ask impossible people to stay they may be civil to *you*, but they're perfectly certain to quarrel with each other. Mr. Hylton doesn't seem to have thought of that.

[*Seats herself at writing-table.*

LADY DENISON. What are they quarrelling about *now?* Was it about the Peerage again?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes. Mrs. Horrocks—who really is the most vulgar person I have ever met—was explaining to Mr. Verreker that she could always tell whether a person was well-born or not the moment she set eyes on him. Good blood always told. Of course, this was meant for the General, whose father was a tailor in Regent Street, as everybody knows. The General took up the challenge at once, and growled out that good birth was all rubbish, and good blood came from eating good butcher's meat, not from being fifth cousin to a baronet. The reference was to Sir James Horrocks, who is Mrs. Horrocks's second cousin twice removed, as she's never tired of telling us. At that Mrs. Horrocks flushed crimson, and said the General was no gentleman—and then I came away.

LADY DENISON. Didn't Mr. Verreker manage to soothe them?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. He didn't try. He seemed rather to enjoy the carnage.

LADY DENISON [*much depressed*]. I wonder if I ought to go? It'll interrupt my German dreadfully.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Your German?

LADY DENISON. Yes. I've had to learn German after all—to please Miss Triggs. She was getting restless at

having nothing to do, and yesterday she said she really must be thinking of getting back to her work. Which was absurd, of course, as no one wants to learn German in September. However, Margery said we ought to find her a pupil, just to keep her amused. So she's to teach me. [*Sighs.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why doesn't Margery learn?

LADY DENISON [*peevishly*]. Margery knows German already. Girls seem to know everything nowadays. [*Murmurs.*] Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder—

[*But* LADY DENISON *seems fated never to get beyond the dative case of her declension this morning, for at this moment* MRS. HORROCKS *bursts into the room. She is purple in the face with indignation.*]

MRS. HORROCKS. Lady Denison! I really must ask you to request General Bonsor to moderate his language. I have never been treated with such disrespect in any house before.

LADY DENISON [*meekly*]. I'm so sorry, Mrs. Horrocks. What has the General been saying?

MRS. HORROCKS. I couldn't possibly repeat it. But he has entirely forgotten the courtesy that is due to a *lady*, as I told him!

LADY DENISON [*deprecatingly*]. Was that wise? I should have thought it would only make the General worse.

MRS. HORROCKS. It *did!* He became so violent that I felt obliged to leave the room at once. General Bonsor ought to understand that this is not a barrack yard.

LADY DENISON [*trying to soothe her*]. You must make allowances, Mrs. Horrocks. The General's temper *is* violent at times, but I don't think he can help it.

MRS. HORROCKS. He *ought* to help it.

LADY DENISON. Still, he's an old man. And he's been in India. And when people have done that we must make allowances for them—on account of the climate.

I hear it's so trying. [*Insinuatingly.*] And we all have failings of *some* kind, haven't we?

MRS. HORROCKS [*stiffly*]. I am not aware that *I* have failings.

LADY DENISON [*accepting the correction with a meekness at which* MRS. EVERSLEIGH'S *blood boils*]. Well. All the rest of us. Perhaps if you went back to him now you would find him a little cooler.

MRS. HORROCKS. I shall certainly not do anything so rash. If I go out on to the terrace do you think I shall be safe from his intrusion?

LADY DENISON [*delighted to get rid of her on any terms*]. Perhaps that would be best. You'll find chairs out there.

[MRS. HORROCKS *stalks out on to the terrace.* LADY DENISON *turns to her sister, who has been endeavouring to go on with her letter.*]

I wonder how the General is now. Do you think I ought to send Margery to him?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*looking up sharply*]. Certainly not. Leave him to Mr. Verreker.

LADY DENISON [*doubtfully*]. Mr. Verreker isn't always very successful with the General. He never seems to take him seriously. And the General hates that. But Margery can always manage him. [*Rising.*] Do you know where she is?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*irritably*]. With Mr. Hylton, let's hope. Do leave *her* in peace.

LADY DENISON [*sitting down again resignedly*]. Very well, Emily. . . . Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, O——

[MARGERY *and* VERREKER *enter from garden.*]

Margery, will you please go to the library and see after the General? He's been quarrelling with Mrs. Horrocks.

VERREKER. The General's not in the library now. We passed him a moment ago crossing the lawn.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*severely*]. I thought *you* were with Mr. Hylton, Margery.

MARGERY [*quite unconscious of the heinousness of this conduct*]. Mr. Hylton's correcting proofs. I've been to the kitchen garden—with Mr. Verreker—to order the vegetables for luncheon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*tartly*]. I hardly think Mr. Verreker can have been of much assistance.

VERREKER [*blandly*]. On the contrary, I was invaluable. I prevented Miss Denison from ordering peas and substituted beans. It's too late for peas. Besides, I prefer beans. And I insisted on peaches. The gardener hesitated, but I was firm.

LADY DENISON [*persuasively*]. *Would* you mind being quite quiet all of you for the next ten minutes? Or I shall never know this declension in time for Miss Triggs. *You* might go back to the library, Emily, as the General has gone.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*rising*]. Well, perhaps I shall be less disturbed there. [*Takes up unfinished letter.*] And you'd better go to the schoolroom and practise, Margery. You'll forget your music altogether if you aren't careful.

MARGERY. Very well, Aunt Emily.

[MRS. EVERSLEIGH *returns to the library.* LADY DENISON *returns to her German grammar.* MARGERY *and* VERREKER *converse in confidential undertones. The effort is well meant, but if they talked at the top of their voices it could hardly interfere with her progress more.*]

LADY DENISON [*murmurs*]. Die Schweſter, Der Schweſter, Der Schweſter, Die Schweſter, *O* Schweſter. [*Aloud.*] You won't mind my going on with my German, will you, Mr. Verreker? I really *muſt* get it done.

VERREKER [*heartily*]. Not a bit. I *like* seeing other people work.

MARGERY [*laughing*]. Then you can stay and watch mother while I go and practise.

VERREKER. I'll come and watch *you.*

MARGERY [*shaking her head*]. Oh no. I never allow anyone to be with me when I practise. On account of the wrong notes.

VERREKER. Well, don't practise then. Stay down here and talk.

MARGERY. And waste half the morning! Certainly not!

VERREKER. You needn't. You can work—at my handkerchief-case. You're taking an awful time over it.

MARGERY. What a shame! Why, I only began it two days ago, and it's half finished.

VERREKER. Is it? Let me see.

MARGERY [*takes it out of basket*]. Look!

VERREKER. I say, it *is* getting on.

MARGERY [*looks at it contentedly*]. Yes. There are the initials. H. V. Aren't they nice and sprawly?

VERREKER. I say, it's really awfully nice of you to work it for me, Miss Denison.

MARGERY [*threading a needle*]. But I like working things for people.

VERREKER. Not for everybody, though?

MARGERY. Oh yes, if they want them. I'm making a whole lot of things for the Willises' bazaar at Christmas.

VERREKER [*disgusted*]. I hope you don't class me with a beastly bazaar?

MARGERY. It'll be a very nice bazaar. It's to pay off the debt on the Parish-room.

[*There is silence for a minute or two.* MARGERY *works away steadily at the handkerchief-case.* VERREKER *looks at her wonderingly.*]

VERREKER [*genuinely curious*]. Miss Denison, don't you ever do *anything* to please yourself?

MARGERY. Of course I do. Lots of things.

VERREKER. Do you? I wish I could catch you at it.

MARGERY [*puzzled*]. What do you mean?

VERREKER. Why, you seem to me to spend your whole time looking after other people. All the morning you run round doing things for your mother.

MARGERY. I'm not "running round" now, am I?

VERREKER. No. Because you're making *me* a handkerchief-case. In the afternoon, if I ask you to come for a walk, you insist on taking Miss Triggs or that ridiculous old General, because it "wouldn't be kind not to ask them." I think that's the phrase? In the evening you play bezique to amuse Mrs. Horrocks. Don't you *occasionally* do something to amuse yourself?

MARGERY [*quite simply*]. I don't know. I've never thought about it.

VERREKER. That's just it! You've never thought about it! Well, I think it's not right. Nobody ought to be as unselfish as all that. It shows up the rest of us too much.

MARGERY [*laughing*]. How absurd you are.

VERREKER. I'm not absurd. Quite the contrary. [*Leaning back lazily in his chair as he makes this profession of faith.*] I like every one to give his mind to getting a good time for himself in this wicked world. Then I know where I am. Of course, I don't mind his doing some one else a good turn now and then. But he oughtn't to over-do it. You *over-do* it.

MISS TRIGGS [*opening the door on the right and poking her head out of* LADY DENISON'S *room archly*]. I'm ready for you now, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON. Very well. [*Rising dismally.*] I shall be in my room with Miss Triggs, Margery, if anyone wants me.

MARGERY. All right, mother.

LADY DENISON. Der apfel, Des apfels, Dem apfel, Den apfel, *O* apfel.

[*Repeats this to herself in a last desperate effort to imprint it on her memory as she disappears through the door on the right to join* MISS TRIGGS. *There is a pause.* MARGERY *has been thinking over* VERREKER'S *last remark gravely. She now takes him to task with charming seriousness.*]

MARGERY. Mr. Verreker, why will you always pretend to be selfish and cynical? I'm sure you're not really.

VERREKER. I don't know about cynical, but I'm unquestionably selfish. I have no illusions whatever about that.

MARGERY. Then why don't you try to improve?

VERREKER. I don't want to improve. I'm quite contented to be as I am.

MARGERY [*rather shocked*]. Nobody can be that! We all have ideals of *some* kind.

VERREKER [*briskly*]. Only for other people. And they're usually great nonsense. If people would only give up bothering about ideals and face facts, what a much happier world this would be for all of us.

MARGERY [*earnestly*]. But that would be dreadful! Think what the world would lose! Think of all the saints and the martyrs who laid down their lives for ideals!

VERREKER [*equally in earnest*]. And think what a lot of harm they did!

MARGERY [*horrified*]. Mr. Verreker, you *can't mean* that! You must feel sometimes how splendid it would be to do something heroic, to lay down your life for a great cause, to make the world better.

VERREKER [*laughing*]. I don't want to make the world better. I think the world's all right as it is.

MARGERY [*astonished*]. But you can't *always* feel like that? There must be times when you feel that the world is full of suffering and injustice. That it's not all right, but all wrong.

VERREKER [*refusing to be impressed*]. Oh yes. When I'm not well, you mean?

MARGERY [*hurt*]. No, I don't. Seriously.

VERREKER [*thinks for a moment*]. Well, sometimes, perhaps—when I'm with *you*, for instance—I have a dim feeling that if we all put our backs into it we might improve things. But I struggle against it.

MARGERY [*wondering*]. Why struggle against it—if you think it would make things better?

VERREKER. Because people who try to improve the world have rather an uncomfortable time, Miss Denison. And I've a great dislike of being uncomfortable.

MARGERY. Mr. Verreker!

VERREKER. Now you're shocked. But that's inevitable, I suppose. If one only knows enough about people one always does disapprove of them.

[*At this point the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of* HYLTON. MARGERY *welcomes him with a smile.* VERREKER, *I am afraid, does not.*]

MARGERY. Have you finished your proofs, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. For this morning.

MARGERY. Then will you come here and bring Mr. Verreker to a better frame of mind? His opinions are simply dreadful—if they *are* his opinions. You must convert him.

VERREKER [*rising*]. No. If I'm to be converted—which I sincerely hope will not happen—I stipulate that it shall be by Miss Denison unaided. Two to one isn't fair. I shall go—unless Hylton does.

[*Takes out cigarette-case.*

MARGERY. You're running away!

VERREKER. Yes—to smoke.

[VERREKER *strolls out on to the terrace and then out into the garden. There is silence for a moment or two. Then*

MARGERY *speaks thoughtfully, putting down her work and gazing straight before her.*]

MARGERY. What a curious man Mr. Verreker is.

HYLTON. Is he?

MARGERY. Yes. He looks at things so strangely. I've never met anyone like him before.

HYLTON. In what way?

MARGERY. In what he thinks about life—if he does think it. He says he's selfish and isn't at all ashamed of it. He says ideals do more harm than good. And that he thinks the world would get along much better if only people would leave it alone and not keep trying to improve it. Have *you* ever met anyone who thought like that?

HYLTON [*lightly*]. Oh yes. It's a phase many men pass through.

MARGERY [*eagerly*]. But they do pass *through* it? They don't *stay* like that, I mean, do they?

HYLTON. It depends. Some men seem as if they were born blind—like kittens. Soul-blind, I mean. They have no perception at all of the spiritual side of things. Then one day something opens the eyes of their soul, and for the first time they *see*.

MARGERY. What kind of thing?

HYLTON. Who can say? There are many ways in which a man's soul may be awakened. A word may do it sometimes—a line in a poem, a sentence in a book. Or perhaps, some one comes into his life, some one who is kind to him or loves him, and then the eyes of his soul are opened.

MARGERY [*enthusiastic*]. How wonderful!

HYLTON [*gravely*]. Yes. But terrible, too. For perhaps no one comes, or the person who might have helped them is careless or indifferent, and then they may remain blind always.

MARGERY [*earnestly*]. But Mr. Verreker—and people like him—*only* need some one to come and open their eyes?

HYLTON. Yes. Verreker's quite a good fellow, I expect, underneath. He'll turn out all right if only he falls into good hands.

MARGERY. But if he falls into bad hands?

HYLTON [*sadly*]. Then he may never make anything of his life. But it won't be because there was no good in him. Only because no one came to bring it out.

MARGERY [*thoughtfully*]. I see.

HYLTON [*the optimist in him coming to the surface again*]. It's astonishing what a lot of good there is in every man if only you look deep enough for it. Men seem selfish and heartless and indifferent on the surface and all the while there's a soul in every one of them! I could give you hundreds of instances from my work among the very poor, cases of people who seemed hopelessly brutish and degraded doing kind things and generous things that would seem incredible if they were not true.

MARGERY [*kindling at his enthusiasm*]. How splendid! But that was *you*, Mr. Hylton. You've such a wonderful influence with people. *You* must make Mr. Verreker *see*.

HYLTON [*smiling*]. He didn't seem very anxious to listen to me, Miss Denison. You must try what *you* can do.

Enter ANSON. *She looks pale, and her eyes are suspiciously red. She draws back nervously on seeing who is in the room.*

ANSON [*hesitating*]. I beg pardon, miss. I thought I might find her ladyship here.

MARGERY [*looking up, surprised*]. Mother is in her room, Anson. But I think she's busy just now. Can *I* do anything?

ANSON. No, thank you, miss. I wanted to speak to her ladyship. [*Going.*

MARGERY. You can see if she's engaged, if you like.

ANSON. Thank you, miss. [*Crosses rapidly to the door*

of LADY DENISON'S *room and opens it.*] Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON [*off*]. Yes. Come in, Anson. What is it?

[ANSON *disappears into* LADY DENISON'S *room, closing the door after her.*]

MARGERY [*turning to* HYLTON *with a smile*]. Poor mother. I expect she was delighted to be interrupted. I know *I* always was when *I* was learning German.

HYLTON. Is that your mother's maid? She looks as if she were in trouble of some kind. Is anything the matter?

MARGERY. I don't know. She's not looked herself for some time. I asked her about it a week ago. I wanted her to see the doctor. But she wouldn't.

HYLTON. Has she been with you long?

MARGERY. Four years. I dare say it's nothing serious. Servants are so silly about what they eat. And then they wonder why they aren't well. Or she may have had some quarrel with one of the other servants. Do you find *your* servants quarrel among themselves, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. No. You see I only keep one.

MARGERY. I sometimes wish *we* did! Only last week William actually gave mother notice just because he couldn't get on with one of the others. But mother told you about that, didn't she?

HYLTON. No.

MARGERY. She meant to. I suppose she forgot.

Re-enter ANSON, *crying bitterly, followed by* LADY DENISON, *much flustered.*

LADY DENISON. There! There! Anson. *Do* try and control yourself. There's no use going on like that. Margery, will you go and find Aunt Emily for me? She's

in the library, I think. I want her advice about something. And don't come back, dear, for a little.

MARGERY. Very well, mother.

[MARGERY *goes to find* MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *after a puzzled glance at her mother and* ANSON.]

HYLTON [*rising*]. Perhaps I'd better? . . .

LADY DENISON [*fussily*]. No, no! Please stay, Mr. Hylton. I shall want *your* advice, too.

HYLTON. Of course, if I can be of any use . . .

[*Reseats himself.* LADY DENISON *sits also. A silence, broken only by the snufflings of poor* ANSON.]

LADY DENISON [*half irritable, half plaintive*]. You'd better sit down, Anson. And would you *please* not snuffle like that if you can possibly help it. It *can't* do any good, and the sound is most distressing.

ANSON. Very well, my lady.

[*Tries unsuccessfully to subdue her sobs.*

LADY DENISON [*her nerves all on edge*]. I do wish Emily would come. Surely Margery ought to have found her by this time.

[MRS. EVERSLEIGH *enters.*]

Ah! here she is. [*Breaking out.*] Emily, a dreadful thing has happened! I thought you would advise me.

[*Hesitates.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*testily*]. *Well,* Muriel. What is it?

LADY DENISON [*with a miserable effort to pull herself together*]. Anson, my maid. [*Wanders off again.*] You remember Anson? She came to me from Lady Carberry.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes, yes. I know. Well?

LADY DENISON [*shying frantically at the subject, and taking refuge in irrelevant detail*]. I was in my room, doing my

German. Fortunately Miss Triggs had gone out into the garden for a few minutes while I was trying to learn the second declension. Then Anson came in. She was evidently upset about something, and looked ready to cry. In fact, she *did* cry. She's been crying ever since. [*Fresh tears from* ANSON.] Oh, *please*, Anson, don't begin again. Or if you do, make as little noise as you can.

ANSON [*sniffing dismally*]. Yes, my lady.

LADY DENISON [*still struggling desperately to postpone the moment when she must come to the point*]. I asked her what was the matter, and she said she wanted to give notice. I was very much astonished, because Anson has been with me four years and has never given me notice before. So I asked her why. And then she said that she and Soames . . . well, in fact, that Soames had——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*interrupting*]. Muriel ! If you are about to say what I suppose you are about to say, wouldn't it be better if Mr. Hylton—— ? [HYLTON *rises again.*]

LADY DENISON [*almost weeping*]. No, Emily. I asked Mr. Hylton particularly to remain. I shall want his advice about this. I shall want everybody's advice. Besides, it's partly his fault. For if it weren't for Mr. Hylton I should never have engaged Soames.

HYLTON [*surprised*]. I didn't know——

LADY DENISON. Oh yes. Soames had a *very* bad character from his last place. In fact, no character at all —which is worse. He was with the Matthisons before he came to me, and Lady Frances gave the most dreadful accounts of him when Margery was staying with her. She said the champagne had disappeared in the most remarkable manner. And as for his *book*, no one could make head or tail of it. I'm not sure there wasn't something about the plate, too. Anyhow, she sent him away—without a character, as I said. And I always think that so hard for a servant. Don't you, Emily ?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. To have no character. Very.

LADY DENISON. Well, of course, he couldn't get another place. And Lady Frances got a letter from him while Margery was there, saying he was almost destitute. So Margery thought he ought to be given another chance. Mr. Hylton is always saying people ought to be given another chance. Aren't you, Mr. Hylton? And as Lady Frances didn't seem willing to have him back and Wilkins was leaving me just then—on account of Thomas—I engaged him. I wish I hadn't now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And now Soames has—— ?

LADY DENISON. Yes. [*Lamentably.*] And I think it's most wicked of him. Anson has always been a good girl, and her mother is a most respectable woman. However, she is willing to forgive Anson and have her home, I'm glad to say, so that will be all right. [*Endeavouring to look on the bright side of things.*] She has no father, fortunately. [*Fresh sobs from* ANSON.] Oh, Anson, not *again!*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*impatiently*]. Hadn't you better send Anson to her room while we decide what is to be done? There's no use keeping her here if she can't control herself.

LADY DENISON [*meekly*]. I thought perhaps you might want to ask her something about all this, Emily? Or Mr. Hylton?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. There's nothing to ask. She's told you her story. Now we must send for Soames and hear what *he* has to say. I suppose we must let him give us *his* version before you dismiss him.

LADY DENISON [*much depressed at the prospect*]. I suppose so. But it's all very painful. Ring the bell, please, Anson, and then go away and cry somewhere else.

ANSON. Yes, my lady.

[ANSON *rings the bell and then goes out, snuffling to the last. Pause.*]

HYLTON [*breaking silence*]. I'm extremely sorry, Lady Denison, if anything I have said has caused all this trouble,

either to you or that poor girl. I never dreamed such a thing could occur.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*with bitter politeness*]. Really? Then you must be singularly lacking in imagination, Mr. Hylton. It seems to me the logical outcome of your theories—when applied to domestic service.

HYLTON [*meekly*]. Of course, there's a danger. But all reforms have an element of danger in them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*triumphantly*]. Then why reform?

HYLTON. But without reform all progress would be impossible. The world would simply stagnate. We *must* risk *something*.

LADY DENISON [*dolorously*]. Well, I'd so much rather not have risked Anson. She was such an excellent maid.

Enter SOAMES. *For a full minute no one speaks. He looks inquiringly from one to the other, but his demeanour is perfectly respectful. Finally, as the silence is growing oppressive, he breaks it.*

SOAMES. Did you ring, my lady?

LADY DENISON [*flustered*]. Yes. . . . What is this, Soames, that Anson tells me about you?

SOAMES [*not a muscle of his face moves*]. What *has* she told you, my lady?

LADY DENISON. That while we were in London three months ago, within a month of your coming to me, in fact, you . . . And now she's expecting a baby in the spring!

SOAMES [*bows*]. That is so, my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*exasperated at the unruffled composure of the man*]. Well! Have you nothing else to say?

SOAMES [*after a moment, during which he seems to be considering the point*]. No, madam—except, of course, that I'm very sorry this should have occurred.

LADY DENISON [*indignantly*]. Is that all?

SOAMES [*after another moment's thought*]. I think that is all, my lady.

LADY DENISON. Of course, you're prepared to make all the amends in your power to poor Anson?

SOAMES [*bows*]. Of course, my lady.

LADY DENISON. Very well, then. You must marry her.

SOAMES [*respectfully*]. I'm afraid I can't do *that*, my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. There, Mr. Hylton!

LADY DENISON [*indignant again*]. Nonsense, Soames. You will be acting very wickedly if you do anything else. Anson is a good girl. A very good girl. She is the best maid I ever had, and I'm very sorry to part with her. But you have brought this disgrace on her, poor thing, and you must certainly marry her.

SOAMES [*still perfectly respectful*]. I beg pardon, my lady. I should be perfectly willing to marry Anson. She seems a very respectable young woman, as you say. Unfortunately, I am already married.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*scandalised*]. What!

SOAMES [*turning to her*]. I have a wife already, madam—I am sorry to say.

LADY DENISON [*helplessly*]. Really, this is most unlucky. Mr. Hylton, can *you* suggest anything?

HYLTON. As things stand, I'm afraid there's nothing to suggest. We must do our best for this poor girl, of course, [*more sternly*] and Soames must help us in any way he can. That's all that I can think of.

SOAMES [*snubbing his interference with the most crushing politeness*]. Anything *Lady Denison* thinks right, sir, I shall be happy to fall in with.

LADY DENISON [*weakly*]. Very well. That will do then, Soames.

SOAMES. Thank you, my lady.

[SOAMES *bows and goes out, preserving his dignity to the last. Everybody seems to breathe more freely when his imposing presence is withdrawn.*]

LADY DENISON [*mournfully*]. Poor Anson. I am really dreadfully sorry about her. It's such a terrible thing to happen to a girl.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. If any *other* of your converts are engaging their servants on philanthropic lines, Mr. Hylton, you had better caution them to choose single men.

LADY DENISON [*cheered at this reflection*]. James, I'm glad to say, *is* unmarried.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. James?

LADY DENISON. The boy who helps in the garden. But, then, he's only sixteen.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Tck! . . [*Pause.*] Of course Soames must be sent away.

LADY DENISON [*sighs*]. I suppose so.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Even Mr. Hylton must see that.

HYLTON [*thoughtfully*]. I'm not sure.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Not sure! After this disgraceful affair!

HYLTON. I am thinking of the future, Mrs. Eversleigh, not of the past. I'm very sorry for what has happened to poor Anson, sorrier than I can say. But that can't be altered now. What is past is past. The question is how are we to help Soames?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*exasperated*]. But we don't *want* to help Soames. Soames has behaved abominably.

HYLTON [*quietly*]. That's no reason for not helping him, is it?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*gasps*]. It certainly seems so to *me*.

HYLTON. Surely not? Surely it's always our business to help any one if we can, whatever he may have done. And in this case we *can* help Soames. If he's sent away now he may be absolutely ruined. You see, it's the second place he's had to leave without a character.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*acidly*]. Do I understand you to consider that in his favour, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON [*mildly*]. No. But it gives him an added claim on our forbearance, doesn't it? Since it makes it more difficult for him to make a fresh start.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*with relentless logic*]. Then the more a servant disgraces himself the more we are bound to help him? And if he only does it often enough I suppose you'd pension him?

HYLTON [*gravely*]. I would still try to help him, whatever he had done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Rubbish!

LADY DENISON. Hush, Emily!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I beg your pardon, Mr. Hylton, but really this is quite preposterous. It's trying to regulate one's life by a theory instead of by the light of common sense.

LADY DENISON [*worried*]. It certainly is rather confusing, you must admit, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON [*gently*]. I think my view is defensible even from the common-sense standpoint—though it's not a standpoint I set much store by. What I want—what we all want, don't we?—is to prevent Soames from sinking into destitution, and so perhaps into crime.

LADY DENISON. I don't want him to do *that*, of course.

HYLTON. The only way to prevent it is to get him some employment. Unhappily, he is probably unfitted for anything but domestic service. The only thing to do, therefore, is to find him a place, and give him a chance of retrieving his character. I would willingly engage him myself if I could, but my establishment has no place for a highly trained butler—or, indeed, for a man-servant at all. But if Lady Denison would keep him on——

LADY DENISON [*protesting*]. Oh no, I couldn't do that.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I should think not, indeed!

HYLTON [*earnestly*]. It needn't be for long. Say a year. If at the end of that time his work and his conduct generally have been satisfactory, Lady Denison can then

send him away with a character, and he'll be able to get another place.

LADY DENISON. But I shan't want to send him away if his conduct is satisfactory.

HYLTON [*persuasively*]. Then why not try the experiment? Of course, I'm now putting this on the lowest grounds, the common-sense grounds. Morally it needs no defence. One should always forgive wrongdoing, shouldn't one?

LADY DENISON. I can't think *that*, Mr. Hylton! Wicked people *must* be punished. If they weren't it would be so discouraging for good people.

HYLTON. Wicked people are only weak people, Lady Denison. If they were strong, they would resist temptation. But they are weak, and they yield to it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*with decision*]. If Soames is unable to resist temptation of *this* kind, I think Muriel had certainly better discharge him, on account of the other maids.

HYLTON. I don't think he'll offend in this way again. He's had a lesson.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. He had a lesson at the Matthisons'.

HYLTON. And profited by it. He has been quite honest since he came to you, hasn't he, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. I believe so.

HYLTON [*triumphantly*]. Very well, then. The experiment answered in that case.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*coming back resolutely to her old point*]. Oh, come, Mr. Hylton, we must be *practical*. Of course, this idea about being kind to unpleasant people and worthless people, and, in fact, to everybody one doesn't like and oughtn't to like, *sounds* very nice. But it's not *practical*.

HYLTON [*giving* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *up in despair*]. Well, Lady Denison, it's for you to decide.

LADY DENISON [*piteously*]. That's just it. I do so hate deciding things. If only I could ask Margery.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Certainly not.

HYLTON [*earnestly*]. It may save a soul.

LADY DENISON. Do you really think that? [HYLTON *nods.*] How very annoying! However, if that's so, I suppose he must stay. [*Sighs.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Muriel!

LADY DENISON [*goaded*]. Well, Emily, what *can* I do? If Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON [*with splendid optimism*]. I do think so. Thank you so much, Lady Denison. I'm sure you'll never regret it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm quite sure she will. And I think it's very wrong of you, Mr. Hylton, to make my sister-in-law behave in this way. She doesn't like it.

HYLTON. You exaggerate my influence, Mrs. Eversleigh. It is Lady Denison's own goodness of heart that makes her want to help people. Without that I should be powerless.

LADY DENISON [*breaking into a smile of content. If you stroke* LADY DENISON *she purrs at once*]. How nice of you to say that, Mr. Hylton! But you always say the right thing. I was really feeling dreadfully dispirited about all this, and you've driven it all away. There's nothing like *tact*, is there?

[GENERAL BONSOR *wanders in from the garden humming a tune.*]

Is that you, General? Have you been in the garden with Mrs. Horrocks?

GENERAL BONSOR [*with icy dignity*]. I have *not*, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON [*flurried*]. Oh no, to be sure, I forgot. . . . I mean, I remember. . . . Just so.

GENERAL BONSOR [*severely*]. I have been in the rose-garden smoking a cigar.

LADY DENISON [*nervously*]. That's so kind of you. It's so good for the roses.

GENERAL BONSOR [*refusing to be propitiated*]. Where Mrs. Horrocks is I have no idea.

[*Opens the door and stalks out, head in air.*

LADY DENISON [*much concerned*]. Dear me, why *did* I say that! Of course, I oughtn't even to have *mentioned* Mrs. Horrocks. But I'd forgotten all about their quarrel this morning. This affair of Soames quite put it out of my head. And now I suppose the General will be offended. Really, what with quarrels among one's visitors and scandal in the servants' hall, life is hardly worth living.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*blandly*]. Mr. Hylton's system!

HYLTON [*rising*]. Shall I go and pacify the General?

LADY DENISON [*clutching at a straw*]. If you would, Mr. Hylton. It really is scarcely safe to leave him alone just now, in case Mrs. Horrocks should come in. [HYLTON *nods, and goes out to soothe the* GENERAL. LADY DENISON *sighs.*] It's been a very *tiring* morning, hasn't it, Emily?

[MISS TRIGGS *puts her head in from* LADY DENISON'S *room. She speaks with deadly politeness, the politeness of the boa-constrictor to the rabbit.*]

MISS TRIGGS. I've been waiting for you nearly twenty minutes, Lady Denison. Is that declension ready now?

LADY DENISON [*flurried again*]. Oh, dear, I'm afraid not. I've really had no time to attend to it since you left me, Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS [*coming into the room, apparently unable to believe her ears*]. No *time?*

LADY DENISON [*volubly*]. No. I'm *so* sorry. I was called away on urgent business. Most urgent business. And it's no good trying to do anything before luncheon now, is it? It will be ready in two or three minutes.

[*An awful pause.*

MISS TRIGGS [*words softer than butter, yet very swords*]. I am afraid it is useless for me to attempt to teach you German,

Lady Denison, if you are unwilling to give even the *small* amount of time I ask to studying it.

Lady Denison [*meekly*]. But really, Miss Triggs——

Miss Triggs. Apologies are unnecessary. I am accustomed to be treated in this way. It is the experience of all women, I believe, who earn their living by education. [*Turns towards door on the right.*

Lady Denison. I assure you——

Miss Triggs. You need not. I *quite* understand. We will abandon our lesson until later in the day, when you may have leisure to apply yourself to it.

[*Sweeps out into the hall, hugging her grievance to the last.*

Lady Denison [*almost in tears*]. Now *she's* offended. Really, it's *too* bad!

Mrs. Eversleigh. Mr. Hylton's system!

Lady Denison. I'd no idea people who taught German were so sensitive. I ought never to have said I would learn it.

Mrs. Eversleigh [*wrathfully*]. You ought never to have asked Miss Triggs here at all. Nor any of these people. Mrs. Horrocks, General Bonsor, Mr. Verreker. They're all impossible.

Lady Denison [*protesting feebly*]. I don't see what's the matter with Mr. Verreker. *He's* not been doing anything tiresome, has he?

[*But the gods are against* Lady Denison, *for this is the precise moment selected by* Margery *to rush into the room, breathless and happy, from the garden, with an announcement that almost turns her relatives to stone.*]

Margery. Mother, dear, is that you? [*Kisses her.*] I've got *such* a piece of news for you. What do you think? Hugh and I are engaged to be married!

Mrs. Eversleigh [*with an uneasy feeling that this is not* Hylton's *Christian name*]. Hugh?

MARGERY [*turning to her*]. Mr. Verreker.

VERREKER *enters from the garden.*

Here he is. [*To her mother again, speaking very rapidly and excitedly.*] He asked me to marry him down by the lake, and I said I would. Aren't you *pleased*?

LADY DENISON [*bewildered*]. Margery!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*furious*]. Really!

[*What* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *would have said had time been given her to put her indignation into words will never be known, for at this moment the luncheon gong rings loudly, and* MARGERY, *who is blissfully unconscious that her news is not delighting everybody, makes for the door, chattering to the last.*]

MARGERY. Oh, there's the luncheon gong, and my hands are simply piggy. We've been grubbing up ferns for my rockery. So are yours, Hugh. Run and wash them, dear. You must wait to be congratulated till afterwards.

VERREKER. All right.

[*Goes out with the shamefaced laugh of the newly engaged man.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I must say——

[*But words fail her.*

MARGERY. I can't stop now, Aunt Emily, or we shall be late, and then the General will be furious.

[MARGERY *runs off into the hall gaily.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *gasps with indignation. She turns on her sister fiercely.*]

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And *you* said Margery was going to marry Mr. Hylton! Muriel, you must be a perfect fool.

LADY DENISON [*stung by the injustice of this accusation*]. I didn't, Emily. *You* said it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*impatiently*]. Well, there's no use

arguing about that now. You must put a stop to this engagement at once, without a moment's delay.

LADY DENISON. Yes. [*With decision.*] I shall speak to Margery about it directly after luncheon. It's very naughty of her. I shall certainly refuse to sanction the engagement.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Better speak to her at once.

LADY DENISON [*weakly*]. I think I'll wait till after luncheon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*vindictively*]. Mr. Hylton again! If it weren't for him Mr. Verreker would never have been invited to stay.

LADY DENISON [*shaking her head sadly*]. Yes. I really must give up going to hear Mr. Hylton. The results are *too* unpleasant. I didn't mind asking the wrong people to the house and trying to make them happy. But I can't have them proposing to my daughter. I must make a stand against it all, now, at once, while I remember.

[*Rises and goes to bell.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*wondering what fresh folly her sister is going to commit*]. What are you going to do?

LADY DENISON. Dismiss Soames!

[LADY DENISON *rings—and the curtain falls.*

ACT III

SCENE.—*Still the* DENISONS' *drawing-room. Time, an hour later. When the curtain rises the stage is empty.* LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS, MARGERY, HYLTON, VERREKER *and* GENERAL BONSOR *troop in from luncheon. The* GENERAL'S *voice is heard booming across the hall as he loses himself in another of his interminable stories, even before he actually reaches the room.*

GENERAL BONSOR. . . . It was at Jubbulpore it happened. We were up there after Pig. Travers was there, I remember, and Hindley, of the 106th. [*Entering.*] No, not Hindley. He died the year before. Bellairs. First-rate chap Bellairs. In the police. I'll tell you a story about *him* some day. He married Molly Henderson, daughter of old Henderson, the judge. Fat Henderson we used to call him because he was so stout. Well, as I was saying, Travers and I were *alone* together——

VERREKER [*to* MARGERY]. Poor Travers!

GENERAL BONSOR [*wheeling round*]. *What*, sir?

VERREKER. Nothing.

GENERAL BONSOR. Did I hear you remark, *Poor* Travers?

VERREKER. I hope not, General. You were not intended to.

GENERAL BONSOR [*scorning this evasion*]. *Did* you remark it, sir?

LADY DENISON [*nervously*]. I think you must have misunderstood Mr. Verreker, General.

MRS. HORROCKS [*in loud, grating tones, not looking at*

the GENERAL, *but seeming to address the company at large*]. And, anyhow, the subject is scarcely worth pursuing, is it? Unless we are to be kept listening to this story the *whole* afternoon.

GENERAL BONSOR. I had not intended to detain Mrs. Horrocks. [*Glares.*

MARGERY [*coming to the rescue*]. Don't you think we'd better all go out for a walk while the sunshine lasts? It's a pity not to make the most of it.

LADY DENISON [*who has been waiting in vain for a moment to speak to her daughter*]. Margery.

MARGERY. Yes, mother. In a moment. Mrs. Horrocks, you'll come, won't you?

MRS. HORROCKS. Thank you. I shall be delighted.

MARGERY. Miss Triggs? [MISS TRIGGS *bows graciously.*] General?

GENERAL BONSOR [*decidedly, having noted that* MRS. HORROCKS *is to be of the party*]. No, thank ye.

MARGERY. Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. I'm afraid I must stay at home and finish my proofs.

LADY DENISON. Margery, I want to speak to you before—— What is it?

[*This to* WILLIAM, *who has entered a moment before with letters on a salver.*

WILLIAM. The post, my lady. [LADY DENISON *takes her letters.*] And could Mrs. Meredith speak to you for a moment?

LADY DENISON [*harassed*]. Oh, very well.

[LADY DENISON *looks for a moment towards her daughter, but, finding her still absorbed in the duty of peace-making, gives up the attempt to speak to her in despair and goes out.* MARGERY *is quite unconscious of her mother's agitation, as she sat too far from her at luncheon to notice that she was not in her usual spirits, and, moreover, when you are practising*

True Hospitality, depression at the luncheon table is not sufficiently uncommon to excite remark.]

MARGERY. That makes three. Who else?

WILLIAM [*to* GENERAL BONSOR]. A letter for you, sir.

GENERAL BONSOR [*taking it*]. Thank ye. [WILLIAM *goes out.*] Excuse me. [*Opens it and begins to read.*

MARGERY. Will you come, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. No, thanks. I am going to drive with your mother.

MARGERY. Very well. Hugh, four. That'll be all.

VERREKER [*chaffing her*]. You don't *ask* whether *I* want to come.

MARGERY [*with mock severity*]. You've got to come whether you like it or not. As a penance.

VERREKER. All right—if it's clearly understood that it's a penance. I'd rather like a walk.

MARGERY. Let's all go and get ready, then. Come, Mrs. Horrocks. Meet in the hall in five minutes.

[*All go out save* HYLTON, *the* GENERAL *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH. MRS. EVERSLEIGH *picks up a book which she is in the middle of,* HYLTON *glances through an article in "The Fortnightly." The* GENERAL *is reading his letter.*]

HYLTON. This article in *The Fortnightly* on Farm Colonies is worth reading, Mrs. Eversleigh.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*declining the suggestion firmly*]. Thank you. I've had *quite* enough philanthropy lately without that. [*Returns to her book.*

GENERAL BONSOR [*with an emphasis which makes* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *positively jump*]. Well ! ! !

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*irritably*]. Really, General Bonsor, these sudden exclamations are most disconcerting. Is anything the matter?

GENERAL BONSOR [*too full of his subject even to notice the rebuke*]. Mrs. Eversleigh, *is* Lady Denison aware of the character of that young man?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*bored*]. Of Mr. Hylton?

GENERAL BONSOR. No! No! Of that young man who has just left the room. What's his name? Verreker.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*interested at once*]. I don't know. You'd better ask her.

GENERAL BONSOR. I shall certainly do so. I venture to think she is *not* aware of it. I venture to think that when she has read what my old friend Nicholson, Toby Nicholson, says about him [*taps letter fiercely*] she will scarcely consider him a fit person to invite to meet *me!*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*with elaborate irony*]. I shouldn't build on *that* if I were you. My sister has peculiar views about hospitality.

[*But the irony is completely wasted on the* GENERAL, *as he is not in the secrets of the* HYLTONIAN *system of philanthropy.*]

GENERAL BONSOR. Can you tell me where I shall find her?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. She'll be back in a moment, I believe. She only went to speak to the housekeeper. Here she is.

[*And, in fact,* LADY DENISON *re-enters at this moment, but her interview with the housekeeper seems to have been of a depressing kind, for she looks more woebegone than ever.*]

GENERAL BONSOR [*breaking out*]. Lady Denison——

LADY DENISON [*to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *fussily*]. Emily, the *cook* wants to leave now. She has found out about Anson, and says she can't remain with me after the month. I told her Soames was leaving, but she said . . . [*Suddenly becoming conscious that* GENERAL BONSOR *is in the room, and is burning to speak to her.*] I beg your pardon, General. I thought Emily was alone.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*with icy distinctness*]. General Bonsor has some news to communicate to you about Mr. Verreker. I needn't say of an unfavourable character.

LADY DENISON. Emily ! [*Collapses.*

HYLTON [*rising*]. Perhaps I'd better——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*grimly*]. On the contrary. Mr. Hylton had better remain. It's all *his* doing, as usual.

HYLTON [*puzzled*]. Mine ?

LADY DENISON [*almost distracted with anxiety*]. Never mind that now, Emily. But, General, if you *have* anything unpleasant to say, *will* you say it as quickly as possible ? Then we shall get it over.

GENERAL BONSOR. I will do so, Lady Denison. [*Clears his throat.*] I have just received a letter from my friend, Colonel Nicholson, who commands the Munster Regiment. . . . Nicholson is an old friend of mine. I met him first at Poonah in '72 . . . or was it '73——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Please* do not bother about *dates*, General Bonsor ! If you will *kindly* come to the *point.*

GENERAL BONSOR [*rearing like an old war-horse under this affront*]. Certainly, Mrs. Eversleigh. . . . I wrote to Colonel Nicholson a week ago. And as I happened to hear Verreker say he had been in the Munsters, I mentioned that he was staying down here. . . . [*Off again.*] The Munsters are the old 43rd, you know. The Fighting Forty-Third. I remember them in the old days when Tom Ferguson was in command. Ferguson and I——

LADY DENISON [*pathetically*]. General, *would* you mind leaving that part out and telling us what Colonel Nicholson said about Mr. Verreker—if he said anything ? It's really important.

GENERAL BONSOR [*stiffly*]. I was about to do so—when you interrupted me, Lady Denison. I will do so now. . . . Colonel Nicholson says. . . . Where the deuce does he say it ? I'll give it you in his own words. [*Fumbles for glasses.* LADY DENISON *is nearly wild with nervous impatience.*] "I'm surprised to hear you've got young Verreker staying with you." [*Looks up at* LADY DENISON.] . . . He means with *you*, of course. [*Returns to*

letter.] "I thought people fought rather shy of asking him. Small blame to 'em. He got into an ugly scrape while he was with us. Spent money belonging to the mess which he couldn't pay back. Might have gone to prison if the thing hadn't been hushed up. Had to send in his papers. Deuced ugly business altogether. Old Wakley, whom you remember at Dum Dum . . ." [*Looking up again.*] That's all.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*feeling the situation to be beyond her powers of comment*]. *There,* Mr. Hylton!

HYLTON [*completely fogged*]. What is it, Mrs. Eversleigh? I'm really quite in the dark.

LADY DENISON. Hush, Emily. You forget Mr. Hylton doesn't know yet. Nobody knows. [*To the* GENERAL, *with an earnestness absurdly out of proportion to the importance of the request.*] General, would you mind leaving us with Mr. Hylton for a few minutes? My sister-in-law and I would like to consult him. We are *very* much obliged to you for letting us hear the letter—and would you please go at once?

GENERAL BONSOR. Certainly.

[*The* GENERAL *goes out into the garden, much offended. The moment he is gone,* LADY DENISON *turns to* HYLTON. *and pours out her lamentable tale.*]

LADY DENISON. Mr. Hylton, what is to be done? You heard what General Bonsor said about Mr. Verreker just now? Mr. Verreker proposed to my daughter this morning and she accepted him.

HYLTON [*horrified*]. Impossible!

LADY DENISON [*dolefully*]. I wish it were. Margery came and told us about it just before luncheon. Of course I was most indignant, and meant to tell her at once that I couldn't think of allowing it, but the luncheon gong rang, and I've had no opportunity of speaking to her since. And it's all your fault, Mr. Hylton, as Emily says, for if it hadn't

been for you I should never have asked Mr. Verreker to the house. I really knew nothing about him, and only did it out of kindness. And now the General tells us this!

HYLTON [*much moved*]. Lady Denison, I can't say how distressed I am that this has occurred. I would have done anything to prevent it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm glad to find there are limits even to *your* toleration, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON [*indignantly*]. Surely you never supposed I could *approve* of such a marriage?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I don't know. You champion Miss Triggs as a visitor—and Soames as a butler. Why not Mr. Verreker as a son-in-law?

HYLTON [*distressed*]. You can't really think that, Mrs. Eversleigh. Knowing what I now know about Verreker how could I possibly think him a fit husband for a girl like Miss Denison?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*shrugging her shoulders*]. Well, well, you don't think so. That's the main thing. The question is, what is to be done?

LADY DENISON. Of course I shall forbid the engagement. I meant to do so before. But this puts it absolutely out of the question.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And Mr. Hylton must use his influence with Margery. It's the least he can do.

HYLTON. Anything I can do, Mrs. Eversleigh, you may be quite sure will be done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And let's hope she'll prove amenable for everybody's sake.

HYLTON [*confidently*]. I've no fears on *that* score. When Miss Denison learns Verreker's true character she won't *wish* to marry him any longer. It would be impossible.

LADY DENISON [*eagerly*]. Yes. Wouldn't it! It's not as if Margery were an *unprincipled* girl or a *bad* girl in any way. She's a very *good* girl. And a *religious* girl. And so she'll do what we tell her.

HYLTON [*who has been pacing restlessly about, and is now by the open French window, turns round sharply*]. Here *is* Miss Denison, coming across the lawn. With Verreker.

LADY DENISON [*feeling that this is the last straw*]. With Mr. Verreker? *How* unfortunate!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I don't see that it matters. He would have to be told what we think about him in any case. Why not now?

LADY DENISON [*flustered*]. Very well. You must help me, Mr. Hylton. I'm so unaccustomed to having to manage Margery. She generally manages me.

[MARGERY *comes in from the terrace.* VERREKER *limps by her side, leaning a little on her arm.* MARGERY *is so full of* VERREKER'S *mishap that she is quite unconscious of the frigidity with which it is received by her audience.*]

MARGERY. Is that you, mother? Poor Hugh has sprained his ankle. [*To* VERREKER.] Be careful of that step. [*To her mother again.*] Isn't it unfortunate? He slipped as we were going down the bank in the old spinney. I sent the others on, and brought him back by the short way across the lawn. [*To* VERREKER.] Is it hurting much?

VERREKER. Oh no. It's nothing.

MARGERY. Sit down here. [*Drags up sofa.*] And you must put your foot up and give it a complete rest. And if it's not better this evening we'll send for Dr. Jenkins. [*To* LADY DENISON.] Wasn't it lucky we hadn't got farther from the house when it happened, mother? It's so bad to walk with a sprain.

VERREKER. It's not a sprain really, Margery. Just a twist. That's all.

LADY DENISON [*sternly*]. Will you please not call my daughter Margery, Mr. Verreker?

MARGERY [*astonished*]. Not call me Margery? But, mother, we're *engaged*!

LADY DENISON. You are *not* engaged, Margery. I cannot allow you to be engaged—at least, not to Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY [*still more astonished*]. Why not, mother?

LADY DENISON. He knows quite well. And I think he's not behaved honourably in asking you to be engaged to him. When you know his true character you will think so too.

MARGERY. Do you mean about his leaving the army?

LADY DENISON. Yes.

MARGERY. But I know about that.

LADY DENISON. I don't think you do. Not *all* about it. You imagine, as I did, that he left the army because he had been foolish or got into debt or something. It was not that. Mr. Verreker left the army for a far more serious reason, which you know nothing about.

MARGERY. Oh yes, I do, mother dear. Hugh told me all about it this morning.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. He *told* you!

MARGERY. Yes. Before he asked me to marry him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Really!

LADY DENISON [*bewildered*]. Margery! It's impossible. You would never have accepted him if he had told you. Mr. Verreker is not a fit person for any girl to marry. He is dishonest.

MARGERY [*laying hand instinctively on* VERREKER'S *shoulder*]. Mother!

LADY DENISON. He spent money that didn't belong to him, money that had been entrusted to him.

MARGERY [*bravely*]. I know. And when the time came he couldn't pay it back. He told me all that quite fully before he proposed to me. I thought it was very honourable of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Honourable!

MARGERY. Yes. Wasn't it honourable? To tell me, I mean. He might have said nothing about it, or at least

concealed the worst part hoping we should never find out. But he didn't. He told me everything. [*Softly.*] I think that was partly what made me say "yes."

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Margery! You must be out of your senses.

MARGERY. Why? It's all over now, quite over and done with. What is past is past.

[HYLTON *starts guiltily as he recognises this fatal phrase.*]

It happened four years ago. Surely we might forget it now?

LADY DENISON. No, Margery. A thing like this can never be forgotten.

MARGERY. I can't think that. One should always forgive wrongdoing, shouldn't one? And if one forgives, why not forget?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Rubbish!

LADY DENISON. Mr. Verreker, I must speak very seriously to my daughter about this. But there's no need for *you* to stay if you'd rather not. It would only be painful for you to hear. Would you rather leave us for a little?

VERREKER [*calmly*]. Thank you, Lady Denison. I don't mind.

[*Settles himself more comfortably on his sofa. Pause.*]

MARGERY [*gently*]. Mother, aren't you all being rather hard on poor Hugh? We all do things we're ashamed of sometimes. Not quite the same things as this perhaps, but still *wrong* things. And if we're sorry, and try not to do them again, oughtn't that to be enough?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*snaps*]. No!

MARGERY [*confidently*]. I'm sure Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON. No, Miss Denison. In this matter I agree with Mrs. Eversleigh.

MARGERY. Mr. Hylton!

HYLTON. Your mother has told you what she wishes. I think you should obey her. It is your duty. [*Pause.*

MARGERY [*slowly*]. Of course, one should obey one's parents I know. . . . But there are other duties as well.

HYLTON [*earnestly*]. Miss Denison, I've no right to speak to you about this, or to urge you in any way. And if you resent it I cannot complain. But the friendship I feel for you and your mother, the kindness you have always shown me, makes me risk that. Break off this engagement. Break it off, I beg of you. It is impossible that a girl like you should be happy with such a man as Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY [*quite simply*]. But one shouldn't only think of *happiness* when one marries, should one?

HYLTON. What do you mean?

MARGERY. I mean there are other things. One would like to be happy, of course. But other things are more important. Helping people, for instance.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*outraged*]. Are you going to marry Mr. Verreker because you want to *help* him?

MARGERY [*eagerly*]. Of course. This morning when Mr. Hylton and I were talking about Hugh, he said there was so much that was good in him that only needed bringing out. That the eyes of his soul had not been opened yet. And he said that if he fell into good hands he would be all right, but if he fell into bad hands he might go on being careless and indifferent always. [*Brightly.*] So I thought if he married me I might prevent him from falling into bad hands.

HYLTON [*much distressed*]. But when I was talking to you about Mr. Verreker this morning I never dreamed of your *marrying* him.

MARGERY. Nor did I—then. But afterwards, when he asked me, I remembered. And so I said yes. I'm sure I did right. [*Lays hand on* VERREKER'S.

HYLTON [*at his wits' end*]. Miss Denison, this is terrible. I assure you what you are doing is not right but wrong. It is quite right that you should want to help Mr. Verreker,

of course. But it is not right that you should marry him.

MARGERY. But perhaps it is only by marrying Hugh that I *can* help him? You see, it's not easy for a girl to help a man, however much she may wish to. They see so little of each other. And if you're really to influence people you must be *with* them, mustn't you? But when people are married they are always together, and then it's easy. So I'm sure I'm doing right in marrying Hugh. When a girl marries she should choose some one she can do good to, some one who needs her. Now I think perhaps Hugh *does* need me, for he's not always been a very good man so far. He's been lazy and rather selfish, and not very thoughtful for others. I'm going to cure him of *that!* Am I not, Hugh?

VERREKER [*half smiling*]. If you can, Margery.

MARGERY [*her face kindling*]. And that's really *worth* doing, isn't it? You see, if I married a *good* man—like you, Mr. Hylton—I couldn't help *him* at all. He'd be quite good already. But Hugh has done foolish things and wrong things, as we know. I can help him.

LADY DENISON. Margery, I think you ought to listen to what Mr. Hylton says, and what I say, and do what we ask. It's very wrong of you to be so obstinate. You know we're thinking only of your good.

MARGERY. Yes, but are you thinking of *Hugh's* good, mother?

LADY DENISON [*plaintively*]. What *does* she mean?

MARGERY. Would it help *him* if I broke it off?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*losing patience*]. Tck! Who ever heard of marrying a man to *help* him.

MARGERY. Why not, Aunt Emily? [*Feeling that her logic is irrefragable.*] Mr. Hylton always says the only real way of helping people is to love them. And if one *loves* people of course one should *marry* them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Loves* them! So that's it, is it! You're not marrying Mr. Verreker because you want to

help him but because you've fallen in love with him. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

MARGERY. Of course I love Hugh. What is there to be ashamed of in that?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*angrily*]. Is there nothing to be ashamed of in wanting to marry a worthless man knowing him to be worthless? You have heard of men marrying worthless women, I suppose? Nobody thinks *they're* performing a moral duty and setting an example to their fellows. On the contrary, we think them weak or vicious. What you are doing is exactly that they do. Only they have the grace not to talk morality about it.

MARGERY [*giving* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *up as* HYLTON *has done before her*]. I don't expect *you* to understand, Aunt Emily. You never do like the way mother and I look at things, do you?

LADY DENISON [*miserably*]. Oh, don't bring *me* into this, please.

MARGERY. Very well, mother. But I did think *you* would be on my side. And Mr. Hylton. [*Laying her hand on* VERREKER'S *protectingly.*] I love Hugh, and I want to help him. There's nothing strange in that, is there? When one wants to help people one always does get to love them. That's the splendid thing about helping people. [*Pause.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Well, there's no use arguing with Margery while she's like this. She evidently has no moral sense whatever!

LADY DENISON. Mr. Verreker, I appeal to *you.* You see what Margery is doing. Release her from this engagement. She is merely sacrificing herself from a fantastic sense of duty.

VERREKER [*with dangerous politeness*]. Surely not? If so, I have gravely misunderstood Mrs. Eversleigh. I thought it was Margery's fantastic sense of affection she objected to?

MARGERY. Hugh, dear!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*fiercely*]. If you are going to insult me, Mr. Verreker——!

VERREKER. I really beg your pardon. Perhaps I oughtn't to have said that. But some not very pleasant things have been said about *me*, haven't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And with reason. A man of your antecedents has no right to propose to the daughter of the house in which he is staying. It is taking advantage of her inexperience. It is dishonourable.

VERREKER [*calmly*]. Is that so? Then I'm probably rather lacking in the finer sense about these things. . . . But I suppose every one is inclined to find excuses for his own misdeeds while remaining inflexibly severe towards his neighbours'. That's the foundation of all morality, isn't it, Hylton?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I should have thought *stealing . . .!*

VERREKER [*as if he were considering the point*]. Yes. Stealing's an ugly word, isn't it? It even makes *me* uncomfortable. . . . And yet if you understood the whole circumstances you might take a more lenient view. But that, of course, would be a very bad thing for morality. So no doubt you'd rather not.

HYLTON. Lady Denison, if Mr. Verreker has anything to tell you that will put a more favourable light on the General's story——

VERREKER. The General's? So *he* told you?

LADY DENISON. He heard it from Colonel Nicholson, who commands your old regiment.

VERREKER. Yes, yes. I remember. He said he was writing to him. Poor General, so he really has been able to finish a story for once!

HYLTON. I was going to say that it would be only fair to give Mr. Verreker every chance of defending himself.

[*There is a moment's pause, during which they wait for*

him to speak. Then he begins. His tone is quiet and unimpassioned, almost as if the case were not his own but some one else's, and his voice never falters. It is a statement of fact, not an appeal for pity, and therefore any display of emotion would be out of place. Perhaps he feels this. Anyhow, he makes none.]

VERREKER. Oh, I don't think it amounts to a defence. Merely a statement of the case from the person who knows most about it—the criminal, as Mrs. Eversleigh would say. I was an extravagant young fool. The regiment was an expensive one. I had a small allowance. I had lost money over cards—and other things—to richer men than I was—who, by the way, ought never to have played with me at all. Like an idiot, I thought I must pay my debts to *them* whatever happened. You know the nonsense that is talked about a debt of *honour*. [*With a bitter sneer on the word.*] To do that I used money belonging to the mess which happened to be in my hands. Of course I hoped to pay it back at once, or I shouldn't have done it. Equally, of course, I failed to do so. The horse that was simply bound to win lost, and I played cards for a whole week and never held a trump. The usual thing. When things were pretty desperate I cabled to Uncle Montague—I was in India at the time—asking him to send me a hundred pounds by return. [*Wearily.*] Of course, I lied to him about the reason. Everybody does lie, I suppose, about that sort of reason. I said I owed it to tailors and people, I remember. Naturally, Uncle Mont didn't see the force of sending me a hundred pounds without haggling about it. Uncles always do haggle about money, I believe. At least, mine do. So Uncle Mont haggled, and like a young ass, instead of going straight to the Colonel or the money-lenders I faked the accounts. It was purely a temporary expedient. I knew the money would turn up in a week or two. It was merely a question of gaining time. But,

as luck would have it, some one with an elementary knowledge of arithmetic happened to glance at the accounts. He spotted something was wrong and told the others, and instead of coming to me they went to the Colonel. The Colonel sent for me, and there was no end of a row. I tried to make him understand, but he couldn't. The stupidity of military men has been proverbial in all ages. I'm a bit of a fool myself, as you will have noticed. He stormed, and I was sulky. My borrowing the money intending to repay it he could *just* understand, but faking the accounts to conceal the fact was beyond him. Though it was the logical consequence of the other if the thing was to be kept dark. When the fat was in the fire Uncle Mont's cheque turned up. But by that time we'd all lost our tempers, the Colonel was prancing round about the *honour* of the regiment [*another bitter sneer*], and I had to send in my papers.

HYLTON [*half to himself*]. Poor fellow.

VERREKER. Eh?

HYLTON. Nothing.

MARGERY [*triumphant*]. Mr. Hylton, I knew *you'd* understand. Thank you. [*Pause.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*acidly*]. Well, Mr. Verreker, you've made out a very clever case, and you've put it very glibly. It must have taken you some time to prepare.

VERREKER [*his tone if possible more cold and unimpassioned than before*]. Just four years, Mrs. Eversleigh. It happened four years ago, and I've not had much else to think of since. It was a confoundedly silly thing to do, as I said, and I've been wondering ever since how I came to do it. The result of my consideration is the story I've told you. I don't ask you to believe it, of course. But it's quite true.

HYLTON. *I* believe it, Verreker. And I'm more sorry for you than I can say. If I've said anything that was harsh or unjustifiable please forgive me.

VERREKER. Not at all, my dear fellow.

LADY DENISON. It's all dreadfully sad, Mr. Verreker. I see that. But still, it doesn't alter the facts, does it? You have had to leave the army. Your reputation is ruined. And that makes you not a fit husband for Margery.

VERREKER. I feel that, Lady Denison.

MARGERY. Hugh!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Then why did you propose to her?

VERREKER [*shrugs*]. A sudden impulse, I suppose. That's how most people propose, isn't it? If they stopped to think they'd think better of it, and then no one would ever marry at all. Which would perhaps be the wisest plan for all parties.

LADY DENISON. Still, in your case you must admit there were special reasons.

VERREKER [*dispassionately*]. I don't know. How many men are fit husbands for the girls they marry? One in a hundred? One in a thousand? Girls are so ridiculously innocent. And men are so ridiculously depraved. I'm not so very much worse than the others. Only I was stupider. And that ruined me. But it was four years ago. And I'm not likely to do it again. A man doesn't play the fool like that twice. One pays too dear for it. Considered as a husband, I'm probably the better for the experience. I've learnt by it. [*Pause.*

LADY DENISON [*making a last appeal*]. Mr. Verreker, what you say is quite true. And I dare say you're not really worse than many men, though the world judges things like this more hardly than other things. But we are *in* the world, and we must accept its judgment as we cannot alter it. If you marry Margery *she* will have to suffer for what *you* have done. I don't think you want her to do that. Be generous and release her from her promise.

VERREKER [*quite sincerely*]. My dear Lady Denison, I put myself entirely in Margery's hands. If she wishes to end our engagement she is absolutely free to do so. I assert no claim over her whatever. I agree with you that

she would only be acting wisely to break it off, and I shan't dream of blaming her if she does so. But you mustn't ask *me* to break it off. A man can't do that. But if Margery wants her freedom she has only to speak.

HYLTON [*enthusiastic*]. That's fine of you, Verreker. That's noble, on my soul. You really *are* a good fellow. I know what it must cost you to give up a girl like Miss Denison. I honour you for it. [*Holds out hand.*

VERREKER [*taking it*]. Thanks, my dear chap. But you mustn't be too precipitate. I haven't given her up yet. Margery hasn't spoken.

LADY DENISON. Margery, dear, you *will* break it off?

MARGERY [*firmly*]. No, mother. As long as Hugh wants me I shall stand by him.

LADY DENISON [*tearfully*]. Then you don't love your mother.

MARGERY [*going to her impulsively, and putting her cheek against hers*]. Of course I love you, mother dear. But I love Hugh, too. [*Pause.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*firing a parting shot*]. Well, I suppose there's no more to be said. If Margery is determined to ruin herself nobody can prevent her. *You*, of course, will continue to forbid the engagement, Muriel, but Margery is of age, and if she chooses to defy you and marry this Mr. Verreker she can do so. But in that case I hope you will entirely refuse to make her any allowance, and, in fact, will disinherit her.

LADY DENISON. What nonsense, Emily. Of course Margery must have an allowance. What else is she to live on? Especially as, I suppose, Mr. Verreker has nothing.

VERREKER. Next to nothing.

LADY DENISON. Very well, then. Naturally I shall have to help them. And as for disinheriting her, that's impossible, even if it were just, as I've no other children. No, Margery must be provided for in any case. I'm sorry

she is unwilling to do as I wish, and I think this engagement terribly unwise and unsuitable. But I suppose she's very fond of Hugh [*sighs*] just as I was very fond of Charlie before I married him. And so she must do as she likes.

MARGERY. Darling mother! [*Kisses her.*] Now you're being like yourself again instead of being like Aunt Emily—which doesn't suit you one bit. I always knew you'd agree with me really—*and* Mr. Hylton [*with a bright glance at him*]—though you took rather longer than I expected. Hugh, give mother a kiss like a dutiful son-in-law, and say you think her the best woman in the world.

VERREKER [*dryly*]. I think I'll spare poor Lady Denison *that*. She's had a great deal to put up with during the past hour.

MARGERY [*remorsefully*]. Poor mother! I suppose she has.

VERREKER. I hope, however, later on she'll get more reconciled to things. She can't really dislike me as much as she thinks, otherwise she wouldn't have asked me here.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*with a bitter smile*]. I'm afraid I really must disabuse you of *that* idea, Mr. Verreker. My sister-in-law has curious views of hospitality. She doesn't ask people to her house because she likes them or thinks them pleasant acquaintances, but because they are disagreeable or disreputable, or haven't anywhere else to go. It's a new form of philanthropy. Mr. Hylton invented it. [VERREKER *bursts into a shout of delighted laughter.*] You seem amused.

VERREKER. I am. [*Laughs again.*] How delicious! So *that's* why I was invited! Because I was down on my luck and wasn't asked to many houses! And I thought it was because of my delightful society.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*venomously*]. You were certainly strangely mistaken.

VERREKER [*much amused*]. So it seems. And *that* explains why all these other people are here, I suppose?

I thought they were rather a damaged lot. Old Bonsor, Miss Triggs, Firket, that appalling Mrs. Horrocks, Hylton, who's an excellent chap but quite mad. [*Mischievously.*] And you too, I dare say, Mrs. Eversleigh?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *I*, sir! Certainly not! *I* am here because I am Lady Denison's sister-in-law.

VERREKER [*easily*]. That's no reason. Lots of people hate their sisters-in-law. I know I simply loathe my brothers.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I am glad to think that Lady Denison is unlike you in that as in every respect.

LADY DENISON [*soothing her*]. Of *course*, Emily. I asked you because I like to have you here. And Mr. Hylton, too. I must invite the people I like occasionally.

VERREKER. I see. Well, Lady Denison, I think it's a splendid idea of yours, far more amusing than the ordinary way of inviting people. And the more dreadful they are the more amusing it must be. Margery and I must certainly take to it when *we* have a house.

LADY DENISON. I don't see anything *amusing* in it, Mr. Verreker. In fact, it's often extremely unpleasant, and leads to most regrettable complications.

VERREKER [*genially*]. Such as *my* getting engaged to Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*snaps*]. That among other things.

VERREKER [*to whom the finer shades of "beginning one's charity at home" have scarcely yet revealed themselves*]. Do none of them *know?*

LADY DENISON. No.

VERREKER. Why not? They'd be awfully amused.

[*The voice of the* GENERAL *is heard on the terrace humming a cheerful stave.* VERREKER *looks round at the sound, just in time to see him approaching the French window on the left of the fireplace. A smile of reckless mischief lights up his face.*]

By Jove, here's the General ! I *must* tell *him.*

LADY DENISON [*despairing entreaty*]. Please ! Please !

VERREKER [*laughing gaily*]. Yes, I *must.* I owe him one for telling you all that about me. *You* owe him one, too. He's given you a most uncomfortable afternoon.

[*The* GENERAL *enters by the window on the left, unconscious of his doom.*]

GENERAL BONSOR [*quite amiable, but feeling that these modern habits of unpunctuality must not be allowed to go unremarked.*] Isn't it tea-time, Lady Denison ? I think so.

VERREKER [*in high good humour*]. Long past. I say, General, why have you been telling tales about me to Lady Denison ?

GENERAL BONSOR [*turning on him fiercely, all his feathers up, like an angry turkey-cock*]. If it comes to my knowledge, sir, that a man who is staying in a lady's house with me is not a person whom *other* people wish to meet, I make it a rule to inform my hostess of the fact.

VERREKER [*heartily*]. And a very good rule, too. Only Lady Denison doesn't ask people to her house whom *other* people wish to meet. It's against her principles.

LADY DENISON [*protesting*]. Mr. Verreker !

GENERAL BONSOR [*gobbling with indignation*]. Upon my word, sir . . . !

[*But* VERREKER *declines to be interrupted either by the* GENERAL'S *anger or* LADY DENISON'S *anguish, and goes on relentlessly. The others listen in horrified fascination. Every one is too much absorbed to notice the return of* MRS. HORROCKS *and* MISS TRIGGS, *who select this unlucky moment to enter by the French window on the right. They listen spellbound.*]

VERREKER [*enjoying himself immensely*]. Lady Denison selects her visitors on philanthropic grounds—because they are

disagreeable or disreputable or merely boring. It's a form of self-denial with her. That's why she asked you. That's why she asked me. That's why she asked all of us.

GENERAL BONSOR [*stunned*]. What !

MRS. HORROCKS [*defiant*]. What ! ! !

VERREKER [*swinging round as if he were shot at the sound of* MRS. HORROCKS'S *raucous voice. To himself*]. Good Heavens ! Mrs. Horrocks !

MRS. HORROCKS [*sternly*]. Yes, sir, Mrs. Horrocks. Miss Triggs and I returned from our walk just in time to hear your extraordinary statement. [*Bleat from* MISS TRIGGS.] May I ask what truth, if any, it contains ?

VERREKER. Really, Mrs. Horrocks, I'm very sorry you should have heard what I said——

MRS. HORROCKS [*cutting him short*]. Is it true, sir ? [VERREKER *makes hopeless gesture, but says nothing.*] Lady Denison, perhaps *you* will inform me ?

GENERAL BONSOR [*more in sorrow than in anger*]. *Why* was I invited here, Lady Denison ?

MISS TRIGGS [*bleating again*]. And *I ?*

LADY DENISON [*completely flustered*]. I never meant you to know. I never meant Mr. Verreker to know. It's very unfortunate. Please accept my apologies, all of you. I'm most distressed this should have happened.

MRS. HORROCKS. Then it *is* true !

MISS TRIGGS. Really !

LADY DENISON [*meekly*]. I don't think Mr. Verreker need have told the General. It was most inconsiderate of him. But I hope you won't hold *me* responsible.

MISS TRIGGS [*with tearful dignity*]. Will you kindly order the carriage to take me to the station, Lady Denison ? I shall leave by the six o'clock train.

MRS. HORROCKS [*haughtily*]. Of course you will not expect *me* to remain.

GENERAL BONSOR [*in hollow accents*]. Nor me ! Boring !

LADY DENISON [*much distressed*]. Oh, *need* you all go

like that? After all, there's nothing so very dreadful in what you've heard. It was Mr. Hylton's idea.

MISS TRIGGS. That dissenting person! I always *felt* he was an impostor. He tried to make me believe he was a clergyman, I remember.

LADY DENISON. He meant it kindly. We all meant it kindly.

MRS. HORROCKS [*drawing herself up to her full height*]. Lady Denison, if you cannot understand how insulting this is to *me* I cannot make you do so. But I *should* have thought, considering my birth and connections, I might have claimed a somewhat different treatment. The carriage, please, for the six o'clock train. [*Sweeps out majestically to pack.*]

MISS TRIGGS [*equally unappeased*]. And will you please send some tea to my room. I shall not come down again before I leave. [*Follows* MRS. HORROCKS.

GENERAL BONSOR [*too broken with the world's ingratitude to protest further*]. Boring!

[*Follows* MISS TRIGGS, *shaking his poor old head. There is a pause while we realise that one of the most tragic things in life is to be a bore—and to know it.* MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *however, not being cursed with the gift of imaginative sympathy, wastes no pity on the* GENERAL. *Instead of this she turns to her sister, and, metaphorically speaking, knocks her out of the ring.*]

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. This, Muriel, is what comes of beginning one's Charity at Home!

[LADY DENISON *has no reply, as the worm is too crushed to turn—and the curtain falls.*]

ACT IV

SCENE.—*The dining-room at Priors Ashton. A week has passed since Act III, and the time is after dinner. The party is sadly reduced in numbers, for* MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS *and the* GENERAL *no longer grace the board with their presence. But* HYLTON *and* VERREKER *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *remain, and they, and* LADY DENISON *and her daughter, are sitting over their dessert, shepherded by* WILLIAM, *who is in sole charge for the present, the abandoned* SOAMES *having taken his departure. The room is lighted by electric lights on the walls, but there are also shaded candles in silver candlesticks on the table. When the curtain rises* WILLIAM *is handing fruit.*

WILLIAM [*to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH]. Grapes, madam?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*taking some*]. What fine grapes you have this year, Muriel.

MARGERY. Aren't they? I took some to old Biddy Porter to-day. She's been ill

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Who is old Biddy Porter?

MARGERY. She lives at Ashton Parva in one of those little houses before you get to the church. And she's had influenza, so I thought it would be nice to take her some grapes. She was so pleased.

VERREKER [*grimly*]. The gardener wasn't.

MARGERY. No. Poor Thomson. He's so funny about the fruit. He seems to think we grow it entirely for ourselves. He's quite angry when I give any of it away. He doesn't even like my sending any to the cottage hospital.

LADY DENISON [*anxiously*]. You will be careful with Thomson, won't you, Margery? He's so easily offended. I remember last year when you took all the early peaches to the Workhouse Infirmary just before we were giving some dinner-parties he nearly gave warning. And I don't want to lose him. He's such an excellent gardener.

[WILLIAM, *having finished his duties, goes out.*]

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*as soon as he has closed the door*]. The new butler hasn't come yet?

LADY DENISON. No. We expect him to-morrow. I do hope he'll be a success. He has the highest references.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*sweetly*]. That must be very distressing to Mr. Hylton.

MARGERY. Aunt Emily, you're not to scratch Mr. Hylton. He's been working at proofs all day and now he wants a rest.

VERREKER. Lucky chap!

MARGERY. What do you mean?

VERREKER. To have *you* prescribing *rest* for him. You don't prescribe much rest for *me!*

LADY DENISON. Has Margery been working you very hard, Hugh?

MARGERY. Of course not, mother. Hugh's only talking nonsense.

VERREKER. Am I! Just you listen. This morning I left some soup with Mrs. Green while Margery was taking Biddy Porter her grapes. She stopped the carriage at Mrs. Green's and dropped me there. It was nearly half an hour before she came back for me, and I had to hear the history of every disease from which the old lady had ever suffered and to look at her bad leg.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*scandalised*]. Really, Mr. Verreker!

VERREKER [*yielding the point with cheerful alacrity*]. Arm, then. I know it was some part of her poor old body, though I couldn't recognise it. It was quite disgusting.

I should have gone away, only Mrs. Green lives four miles from here, and I hate walking when it's hot. However, the carriage came back at last, and then we drove on to the church, which Margery is decorating for some reason or other. I think because the harvest has failed. There I sat in a pew and made a wreath of mangel-wurzels to adorn the font.

MARGERY. Not *mangel-wurzels*.

VERREKER. Well, some kind of vegetable. We got back to lunch at last—late, of course. The wreath took so long. And in the afternoon—after a brief interval of repose—I wrote letters on behalf of a certain Mary Gamage who wants to get into an orphanage at Basingstoke—which seems an odd taste. I wrote twenty-five of them.

MARGERY. Only after you'd been coaxed for a whole quarter of an hour. You were quite cross about it, and said you weren't a galley-slave.

VERREKER. Well, I was wrong.

MARGERY. You were very disagreeable.

VERREKER [*equably*]. I know. I hoped we were going to quarrel. But you wouldn't. That's the worst of Margery. She never will quarrel.

HYLTON. It's a good fault.

VERREKER. Is it! However, I wrote twenty-five letters on behalf of Mary Gamage, as I said. And I've got seventy-five still to do. They were to ask subscribers to the orphanage for their votes. I gather some five hundred other people are busily engaged in writing the same number of letters on behalf of *their* orphans, and the subscribers, in common politeness, will have to write to the whole five hundred of us to say they have given their votes to the 501st. They can only vote once. The mere expenditure in postage stamps would suffice to endow another orphanage, not to speak of the waste of my time and theirs. Moreover, I'm given to understand that this ritual is gone through every time the orphanage has a vacancy, and that

there are more than a hundred orphanages similarly conducted in this distracted country. Whoever heard of such tomfoolery !

MARGERY. It *is* troublesome, of course. But I don't see how else you could settle whom to let in. There are so many orphans.

VERREKER [*briskly*]. You should put the names in a hat, shake it, and take the one that fell out first.

LADY DENISON. But would people subscribe to orphanages if they didn't get a vote ?

VERREKER. What on earth do they want votes for ?

LADY DENISON. In order that *their* orphans may get in instead of the others.

VERREKER. Another illusion gone ! I used to think charitable people gave their money because they were genuinely anxious to do good. I now find on the highest authority that they do it to keep out each other's orphans. Margery, I won't write another letter.

MARGERY [*protesting*]. Oh, Hugh, how horrid of you. If you don't *I* shall have to do them, and you said you would.

VERREKER [*resigned*]. Very well, I suppose I must as I said so. But my faith in charity is shattered. Nothing survives a closer acquaintance. Not even orphanages.

MARGERY [*laughing*]. How absurd you are, Hugh. You know you only talk like that because you think it will shock us. And it doesn't shock us one bit. We only think it silly.

VERREKER. As you please, dear. But if that's the only way in which orphans can be kept alive I think you'd better drown them—and I've been an orphan myself.

LADY DENISON. Do you mind talking about something else for a moment, Hugh ? I think I hear William with the coffee, and he mightn't like it.

[WILLIAM *comes in and hands coffee, and departs again. While he is doing so* HYLTON *obligingly comes to the rescue with a new subject.*]

HYLTON. Did you get as far as Croome this afternoon, Mrs. Eversleigh ?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes. Poor Lady Seathwaite is still in bed. But the doctor says she may be able to come down on Monday.

VERREKER. What's the matter with Lady Seathwaite ?

[MRS. EVERSLEIGH *ignores him.*]

LADY DENISON. She has a bad attack of gout. She has it every autumn.

VERREKER. I see. [*Tersely.*] Over-eats herself.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH [*sharply*]. Mr. Verreker, will you kindly remember that Lady Seathwaite is a friend of mine ? And that I do not care to hear her insulted ?

VERREKER [*blandly*]. I'd no intention of insulting her, Mrs. Eversleigh. It was only a suggestion to account for her indisposition.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. A most uncalled-for suggestion.

VERREKER [*with exasperating amiability*]. Very well. I withdraw it. I dare say she eats too little, and suffers from poverty of the blood. Margery shall drive me over to-morrow afternoon, and we'll ask her which it is.

MARGERY. Hugh, Hugh, you're not to laugh at Aunt Emily. She doesn't like it. And we can't possibly go over to-morrow afternoon because you're coming with me to tea at the Vicarage.

VERREKER. Let's skip the tea.

MARGERY. Certainly not. The Willises would be dreadfully hurt if we didn't go. And it's so unkind to disappoint people.

[*The electric light suddenly goes out, leaving only the candles on the table alight.*]

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Good Heavens ! What's that ?

LADY DENISON [*calmly*]. Only the electric light, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Only* the electric light !

LADY DENISON. It does happen sometimes. You see, Basset, who looks after the dynamo, isn't really an electrician. He was a footman.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Then why does he look after the dynamo?

LADY DENISON. Well, he was out of a place——

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Muriel!

LADY DENISON [*worried*]. What's the matter *now*, Emily? Nothing else has happened, has it? . . . [*Going on with her story placidly.*] He was out of a place, as I said. He had been second footman at the Fox-Wilkinsons', at Abbots Ashton. But I'm afraid he sometimes took more to drink than was good for him. At least, he was found one day after luncheon in the dining-room quite intoxicated. So they had to send him away. When Margery heard of it she wanted to have him here—under Soames. But Soames didn't seem to like the idea. He was quite indignant about it, in fact. So as the electric light was being put in just then, Margery said that Basset could be taught to look after the engine. But he's not very skilful as yet, so the light sometimes goes out for hours at a time. I hope it isn't going to to-night. [*The light comes on again. Cheerfully.*] That's better! [*Depressed.*] Now it's gone again. [*This as the light goes out afresh. A moment later it recovers, then has a series of spasms, and finally settles to work again.* LADY DENISON *heaves a sigh of relief.*] That's right!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I thought you had given up engaging your servants on altruistic principles, Muriel?

LADY DENISON [*quite simply*]. So I have. But I couldn't send Basset *away*, could I? I don't think he could get another place. Besides, he's really wonderfully improved. He hardly ever takes too much now. Shall we go? [*Rises.*

[LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *and* MARGERY *go out,* HYLTON *holding open the door for them.* VERREKER *strolls to the fireplace and leans against the mantelpiece lazily, stretching himself.* HYLTON *returns to his seat.*]

VERREKER [*laughing*]. Lady Denison really is the most absurd person in the world.

HYLTON. Is she?

VERREKER. Yes. But good people always are more or less absurd, aren't they?

HYLTON [*smiling*]. The children of this world *are* wiser than the children of light certainly.

VERREKER. Exactly. And she'll never learn wisdom now, poor lady. She's listened to *you* too long. She'll never get the poison out of her system.

HYLTON. She dismissed Soames.

VERREKER. But keeps Basset. You've won after all. Cigar? [*Brings silver box from mantelpiece.*

HYLTON. Thanks.

VERREKER [*re-seating himself*]. Poor Mrs. Eversleigh! How she loathes me! She'll never forgive me for having proposed to Margery.

HYLTON. It doesn't matter. You've Lady Denison on your side.

VERREKER. Thanks to *you.*

HYLTON [*lightly*]. I don't think *I'd* much to do with it.

VERREKER. I know better. If it hadn't been for you, Lady Denison would be still unreconciled. I've no illusions on that point.

HYLTON. Miss Denison would have made your peace for you.

VERREKER. Yes. Margery has been a brick all through. She always would be. But you backed her up. I wonder why. [*Pause.*] Why was it?

HYLTON [*hesitates*]. Perhaps I felt I owed you some amends for the way I behaved when I first heard of your engagement.

VERREKER [*raising his eyebrows*]. I don't know. Your attitude was a perfectly reasonable one. It *was* a most ridiculous engagement for Margery. *Is*, in fact.

HYLTON [*cheerfully*]. Oh no.

VERREKER. Oh yes. I am a young man with a discreditable past and no future. Margery will have a good deal of money one day. Considered as a match for her it's preposterous.

HYLTON [*shrugs*]. I wasn't thinking of money.

VERREKER. You never are, my dear fellow.

HYLTON [*laughing*]. Besides, you won't be able to squander Miss Denison's money even if you want to. It'll all be tied up strictly in trust.

VERREKER. Yes. I shall be like a dog with a biscuit perpetually on his nose, and nobody ever saying "Paid for."

HYLTON [*laughing again*]. Something like that.

VERREKER. However, I didn't propose to Margery for her money, so I don't know that that matters.

HYLTON. Of course not. You proposed to her because you loved her. Because you couldn't help seeing how good and unselfish and noble she is. [VERREKER *raises his eyebrows again.*] No one could help loving Miss Denison. She has all sweet and lovable qualities. She is the most wonderfully good woman I've ever known.

[*And the face of the altruist glows with enthusiasm.*

VERREKER. Yes. [*Reflectively*]. It's a great pity.

HYLTON [*astonished*]. What do you mean?

VERREKER. People really ought to have some redeeming vices, don't you think? But Margery's quite impeccable, poor dear. I remember I spoke to her about it before I ever thought of proposing to her.

HYLTON [*deciding that this must be a joke*]. Scoffer!

VERREKER. Not at all. . . . Margery's simply riddled with philanthropy and unselfishness, and the Devil knows what. *I* call it morbid. I don't believe she ever thinks of herself at all. I've never known any one like her before. I don't believe there *is* anyone like her.

HYLTON [*serious again*]. Miss Denison has a curiously perfect character.

VERREKER [*ruefully*]. That's what worries me.

HYLTON. Tck !

VERREKER. It's all very well for you, Hylton. You've not got to live up to it. And if you had I dare say you wouldn't mind. You're a bit of a saint yourself. But for a healthy, easy-going mortal like me it's rather alarming.

HYLTON [*rallying him*]. You'll get used to it.

VERREKER. You think so ?

HYLTON. Yes—with Miss Denison's help. Why, she's helped you already more than you realise. You're a different man from what you were a week ago.

VERREKER [*peevishly*]. I know. That's what's so annoying. Fancy *me* distributing soup to old ladies and soliciting votes for a blighted orphan ! It's simply disgusting.

HYLTON [*quite sure this is a joke*]. Nonsense, my dear fellow. You like it really, you know.

VERREKER. I beg your pardon ! My whole soul—I think that's what you call it ?—revolts against it. But I *do* it. That's the miracle. And I did think the age of miracles was past !

HYLTON. The age of miracles will never pass while there are men and women like Miss Denison in the world !

[*The utter sincerity with which* HYLTON *says this makes it impossible to laugh at him, even good-naturedly, as* VERREKER *would like to do.* HYLTON, *with the glow in his face and the look of the mystic in his eyes, is not a man one can laugh at, while his absolute unconsciousness, his total lack of anything like pose or insincerity, makes* VERREKER *feel that he has never liked him or admired him so much before. It may be madness, but it is a divine madness. There is silence between them for a moment while* VERREKER *looks at his companion curiously. Then a slow smile comes into his face, and he speaks quietly.*]

VERREKER. You're a queer chap, Hylton.

HYLTON [*returning to ordinary life with a start*]. Why ?

VERREKER [*thinking better of it*]. Nothing.

HYLTON [*with utter conviction*]. Yes. Faith can move mountains, now as always. And Miss Denison has faith, faith in goodness and in truth and in self-surrender. She'll convert you yet.

VERREKER [*firmly*]. *No!*

HYLTON. She *will*. You laugh at altruism now. In a year you'll be an altruist yourself. And it's your marriage that will have done it.

VERREKER [*a light dawning on him*]. So *that's* why you approve of this absurd marriage.

HYLTON [*nods*]. It's to save a soul.

VERREKER. More philanthropy!

HYLTON [*accepting the scoff good-humouredly*]. More philanthropy. This marriage is going to be the making of you. It will help you to find yourself. Your true self.

VERREKER [*sardonically*]. I should have thought I'd managed *that*.

HYLTON [*all the optimist coming out in him*]. You're wrong. Your real self is not the healthy, easy-going person you talk of. It's the strong, self-restrained, self-denying man Miss Denison will put in his place. [*Enthusiastic.*] There's nothing the love of a really good woman can't do for a man. It brings out all that is fine in his nature, and drives out all that is base. That is what your marriage will do for you!

VERREKER. The deuce it will!

HYLTON [*collapsing under this cold douche—as I'm afraid* VERREKER *meant him to do*]. But I must apologise for talking to you like this. I'm afraid it bores you.

VERREKER [*a little penitent*]. Not a bit. I like it.

HYLTON [*shaking his head*]. No.

VERREKER. Yes, I do. In fact, I'm rather interested in the Psychology of Benevolence just now. Please go on.

HYLTON [*laughing*]. Not to-night. Besides, we ought to be moving. [*Rises.*

VERREKER. Perhaps so. [*Rises. He seems to reflect for a moment.*] Will Margery *always* be as good as she is now, do you suppose?

HYLTON [*unhesitatingly*]. I'll stake my life on it.

VERREKER [*eyebrows raised*]. No chance of her outgrowing it?

HYLTON [*firmly*]. None!

VERREKER. Ah! I hoped she might. . . . Well, Hylton, I'm glad to have had this chat with you. You really are a good chap, you know. And if you can go on being friends with a sweep like me I shall be grateful.

HYLTON [*smiling*]. I think I shall manage that.

VERREKER [*half to himself*]. I'm not so sure.

[*They stroll towards the door; but before they have had time to reach it,* MARGERY *enters, and at once begins to scold them, in high good-humour.*]

MARGERY. You *rude* people! You've stayed *much* too long over your cigars. How is poor William to clear away?

VERREKER. Can't he do that to-morrow morning?

MARGERY. That shows how much *you* know about managing a household!

HYLTON. We were just coming, Miss Denison.

MARGERY. You're too late now. Mother's gone to bed. She's tired. And Aunt Emily's going too. She's cross. And so am I. I'm offended.

VERREKER. Stay five minutes. Sit down here.

MARGERY. No!

VERREKER. Yes. [*Puts her gently in his own chair. He sits on an arm of arm-chair.*] And give me a cigarette.

MARGERY. Ought you to smoke any more?

VERREKER. No. But I will. [*Does so.*

MARGERY [*cheerfully*]. I've been getting some more letters done for Mary Gamage.

VERREKER. That infernal orphan!

MARGERY. Sh ! So you won't have *quite* seventy-five more to write.

VERREKER. Thank Heaven !

MARGERY [*gaily, quite blind to the enormity of the suggestion from* VERREKER'S *point of view*]. I think you might get up and do a few before breakfast to-morrow, just to show your gratitude. I'll help. I *should* like to get them all off before we go to the Vicarage.

VERREKER. Margery, I refuse !

MARGERY [*unruffled*]. Very well. But you're very foolish. Before breakfast is the nicest part of the day at this time of year. You lazy people who don't come down till half-past nine don't know what you're missing.

VERREKER. We'll take your word for it.

MARGERY [*ignoring this sarcasm*]. Will you come to tea at the Mackworths' on Friday, Mr. Hylton ?

HYLTON. Certainly, if you like.

MARGERY. *You* must come too, Hugh.

VERREKER. All right. Who are the Mackworths ?

MARGERY [*seemingly unconscious of the appalling character of the programme*]. They live in a *funny* little house in the village. Old Mrs. Mackworth's very deaf, and *he* can't hear much either, so they don't have many visitors. It's so tiring talking to deaf people, isn't it ? One has to shout so. But I always try to go at least once when we're down here. It cheers them up, I think. I'm glad you're both coming. [VERREKER *takes cigarette from between his lips and groans.*] And now I really must go to bed. Good-night.

VERREKER [*detaining her*]. No. Stop a bit longer.

MARGERY [*shaking her head with mock firmness*]. Can't.

VERREKER. Yes, you can. Just till I've finished this. Besides, I've something rather particular to say to you.

HYLTON [*rising*]. In that case perhaps I'd better retire to the library ?

VERREKER. Do. I'll be with you in two minutes.

[HYLTON *goes out, and there is a brief silence.* VERREKER *is plunged in thought, and his brow puckers.*]

MARGERY [*merrily*]. Well? What is this *important* thing you've got to say to me?

VERREKER. I'll tell you. [*Pause. Looks at her fixedly for a moment or two.*] By Jove, you *are* pretty, Margery.

MARGERY. I don't think *that's* very important.

VERREKER. Then you're very much mistaken! . . . However, that's not what I had to say. [*Pause. He pulls himself together with an effort, and speaks gravely but kindly.*] Margery, I want you to break off our engagement.

MARGERY [*unable to believe her ears*]. Hugh!

VERREKER [*gently*]. My dear, I don't like saying it, and I hope you don't like hearing it—though I don't want it to hurt you too much either. But I've been thinking things over, and I'm quite sure we two oughtn't to marry.

MARGERY. Why not?

VERREKER. For lots of reasons. I'm not good enough for you, Margery, and that's the long and short of it.

MARGERY. What nonsense!

VERREKER. It's not nonsense at all, unfortunately. It's a painful truth. Mrs. Eversleigh was right. I ought never to have proposed to you.

MARGERY [*sadly*]. Do you mean you don't love me, Hugh, as you thought you did?

VERREKER. No. I don't mean that. I love you as much as ever, more perhaps now that I'm going to lose you. But on every ground except love I'm quite unfit to marry you.

MARGERY [*pleading*]. Surely love is enough?

VERREKER [*almost impatient at what he considers the colossal ineptitude of that remark*]. No. It isn't. Margery, let's face facts, and not shirk them as every one else seems to do. Marriage isn't a thing to be romantic about. It *lasts* too long.

MARGERY. Hugh !

VERREKER. My dear, it may last forty years. Surely that's long enough in all conscience. [*Recovering from his momentary irritability.*] Very well, then. As one marries for a long time one should choose carefully, reasonably. One mustn't be carried away by passion. Passion's a great thing in marriage, but common sense is a greater. Now what sort of a life should we make of it together if we married, you and I ? Why, my dear, we've not an idea or a taste in common. Everything you say makes me laugh, and almost everything I think would make you blush. It's simply absurd for a girl like you to marry a fellow like me. Let's say so frankly and end it.

MARGERY [*puzzled*]. But, Hugh, you *liked* being engaged to me at first, didn't you ? Why have you changed your mind ? Have *I* done anything ?

VERREKER. No, dear. You've been absolutely sweet and good, as you always would be. Only you're *too* good, and that's all about it.

MARGERY [*rather hurt. She is convinced that this must be one of* HUGH'S *jokes, and she naturally thinks it rather heartless of him to joke at such a moment*]. Now you're laughing at me.

VERREKER [*absolutely serious*]. I never was further from laughter in my life. I say you're too good and I mean it. You look on life as a moral discipline. I look on it as a means to enjoyment. You think only of doing what you imagine to be right. I think only of getting what I know to be pleasant. [*With an ironical smile.*] They call it incompatibility of temper in the Law Courts, I believe.

MARGERY [*puzzled again*]. I don't understand you, Hugh. Sometimes you seem quite serious, and then you say something horrid that spoils it all.

VERREKER. I know, dear. You don't understand me, and it's just as well you don't. But that makes the

idea of marriage between us rather ridiculous, doesn't it? The sort of man you ought to marry is Hylton—who, by the way, is over head and ears in love with you. You should have heard his eulogies over you ten minutes ago. He was simply lyrical! Yes, you must marry Hylton. Will you?

MARGERY [*half laughing, half crying*]. I'm still engaged to you, dear, so far.

VERREKER [*briskly*]. I'll release you. And you really will be happy with Hylton. He's a first-rate chap. Promise me that when you've stopped mourning for me—say in about a fortnight's time—you'll seriously consider the possibilities of Hylton.

MARGERY [*more hurt and more puzzled than ever*]. Are you really heartless, Hugh, or do you only pretend to be?

VERREKER [*shrugging his shoulders*]. I don't know. Ask Hylton.

MARGERY [*sadly*]. I thought we'd been so happy together since we'd been engaged.

VERREKER [*heartily*]. So we have, dear—in spite of Mary Gamage. But then we've only been engaged a week. And I feel *years* older for it!

MARGERY [*asking the question in complete good faith*]. *Seriously*, Hugh?

VERREKER. I'm *serious* enough. [*But he uses the word in a different sense.*] You think everybody can be as self-denying as you are, Margery. You're wrong. Some people are born self-denying just as other people are born self-indulgent.

MARGERY [*encouragingly*]. But you may change.

VERREKER [*another moment of impatience*]. Men don't *change*, Margery. They *repent*, but they don't *reform*. [*The moment passes.*] And so our engagement has been a mistake. It's my fault, I know. I ought to have thought of all this before I asked you to marry me. But you were so pretty and—well, I didn't. Will you forgive me?

MARGERY [*gravely and a little sadly*]. Of course I forgive you, Hugh. It's not your fault. You thought you loved me and you asked me to marry you. Now you find you don't, and you ask me to release you. You've been quite kind and straightforward. There's nothing to forgive.

VERREKER [*with the nearest approach to emotion that he has allowed himself since the beginning of this scene*]. My dear, my dear, it's not that. I loved you before. I love you still. I believe I shall always love you—so long as I don't marry you. But married we should be miserable.

MARGERY [*gently*]. I don't think *I* should be miserable.

VERREKER [*briskly*]. I know *I* should. At first I should be as unselfish as the deuce just to oblige *you*. But after a bit I shouldn't be able to stand it, and I should strike. And then you'd be disappointed, and I should be disagreeable, and our marriage would become a tragedy. [*Sincerely.*] I don't want that to happen. I'd rather you found me out now while you're still fond of me than later when you had come to hate me.

MARGERY. I should never *hate* you, Hugh.

VERREKER. You couldn't help yourself, my dear. An unhappy marriage would demoralise even you. They say some forms of suffering ennoble people, and putting up with what one doesn't like is supposed to be good for the character—though I'm sure I don't know why. But an unhappy marriage never ennobled man or woman. It makes them peevish and unreasonable. It sours their tempers and ruins their digestions. *My* parents didn't get on together, and I know. If the parsons cared two straws about morality instead of thinking only of their dogmas, they'd make divorcing one's wife as easy as dismissing one's cook. Easier.

MARGERY. Hugh !

VERREKER. They would ! When married people don't

hit it off, they jar. There's no middle course. And when the jarring has gone on for a certain length of time it gets past bearing. Human nerves won't stand it. Nothing will enable them to stand it. Not love, nor religion, nor all the seven deadly virtues. Socrates was a good man, but he made his wife pretty unhappy.

MARGERY [*the tears are dangerously near her eyes*]. And you think I should make you unhappy?

VERREKER [*cheerfully*]. I'm sure of it. So let's behave accordingly. [*More gently. The danger of tears has been averted.*] Come, Margery, say you release me and get it over.

MARGERY [*slowly*]. Very well. If you really wish it . . . you're sure you *do* wish it?

VERREKER. Quite. Thanks, dear. You've behaved like a trump, as you always do. And I think I must kiss you good-bye. [*Does so tenderly.*] Don't say anything to the others till after I've left. I rather dread Mrs. Eversleigh's unconcealed satisfaction. I shall go to-morrow.

MARGERY. Very well. If you'd rather not.

VERREKER [*looking at her half ironically*]. I'm afraid you think I've been a selfish beast about this?

MARGERY [*wistfully*]. A little selfish, perhaps.

VERREKER. You're wrong. For the first, and I hope the last, time in my life I've done an unselfish action. I'm a pauper, you know, and you're something of an heiress. And I've given you up without compensation. [*Dispassionately.*] It's rather to my credit.

MARGERY [*sadly*]. Only because you wouldn't be happy.

VERREKER. No. Because *you* wouldn't be happy. *I* should have been all right. But I had to put it the other way or you wouldn't have let me go. *I* should have given up philanthropy after the first six weeks and had no end of a good time. But *you'd* have been wretched. We've

done the right thing. [*Rising.*] And you won't forget about Hylton, will you? Shall we go?

[*He goes and opens the door for her. They go out as the curtain falls.*]

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